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A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

ASTOUNDING

STORIES 20

DEC.
1933



CESTRAL VOICES
by
Nat Schachner

On Sale Third Wednesday of Each Month

VOLUME XII
NUMBER 4

ASTOUNDING STORIES

DECEMBER
1933

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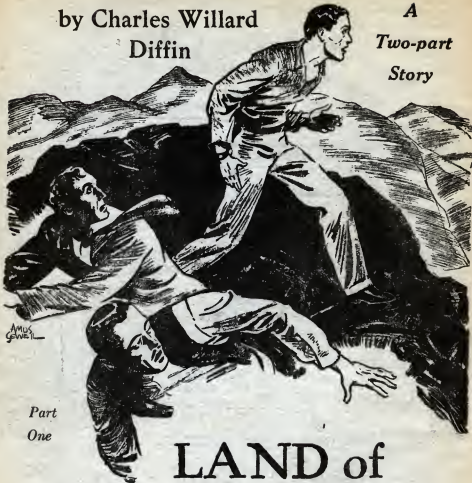


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A New Story of the Sky
by Charles Willard
Diffin

A
Two-part
Story



Part
One

LAND of the LOST

ONLY CHANCE gave Blaine a close-up of the tragic and mysterious happenings that morning of May 1st. Chance took him through Central Park when he might easily have been in any of a thousand other places instead.

James Blaine, twenty-five, but looking older; tall, sinewy, lean-faced and bronzed beneath a shock of sandy hair. Somewhat the look of a scholar—a scientist, a close ob-

server might have concluded—but his healthy tan and the easy swing of his walk told of muscles that had never been developed in a laboratory. And Blaine, chief materials engineer on the big Metropole Bridge job, had some problems on his mind. He chose to walk through the Park.

He was deep in thought when he saw, across the sunlit lawn, a crowd of men like a black blot. One,

Inexplicable phenomena explained! All man's science contradicted by the strange new laws of this world of the missing——



standing on some object that raised him above the rest, was haranguing them.

"A tough-looking lot," Blaine acknowledged, but he walked toward them. There had been labor troubles on the bridge job; he was interested in any information that

might come his way from the discontented.

On the fringe of the crowd an old man with a portable telescope on a tripod was hunting customers at ten cents a look. "See all the wonders of the heavens! See the moon in broad daylight!" Blaine smiled at

the misdirected salesmanship that would try to sell science to that mob.

The leader, dark haired, swarthy faced, was innoculating the men with fiery, anarchistic propaganda. But his venom seemed too generally distributed to be of interest. Blaine turned away; then something in that dark face swung him back once more.

"By all the gods," he whispered, "it's Portrero! So this is what Port has got down to!"

He was picturing the man as he had known him. Portrero, chief chemist for Allied Engineers, Inc., who had the building of the Metro-pole. Portrero, sly, unscrupulous, but capable. Blaine acknowledged that—Port knew his stuff.

Abruptly the speaker whirled. As if he had caught Blaine's thoughts telepathically, he faced about. His eyes were mere slits of hatred; his face, thin and saturnine and vindictive, worked with rage. He raised a hand and pointed at Blaine.

"There's one now," he shouted. "One of their tools! A dirty, sneaking, boot-licking——"

And then it happened. The thing which fate had arranged that Blaine should see!

Blaine suddenly was knocked sprawling. A whistling wind had struck him like a blow. He hardly knew it, nor heard his own voice in a wordless, startled cry. But, even as he fell, he was vividly aware that his staring eyes no longer saw a crowd of men—no Portrero, waving his fists in air—no living man of all who had stood there a fraction of a second before!

He saw, instead, a great gash in the earth, an excavation of tremendous extent, ripped instantly across the green expanse of lawn!

All in silence but for one faint clap like thunder. One brief moment when the black clot of men was invisible—then the rush of wind. He saw the place where they had been, saw the yawning chasm! And, again, silence.

It was done!

Blaine rolled, came to his feet, found himself running with others toward that raw cut. Those others were shouting incoherently; Blaine answered them in futile, hoarse-voiced denial.

"It wasn't a blast! It wasn't an explosion! I fell toward it—not away! So did every one!"

He stopped at a safe distance from the edge of the pit. It was long and narrow. He could see into it. The rock at the bottom was as smooth as if it had been swept. Here and there loose dirt and boulders broke from the sheer walls and slipped down in rattling avalanches of raw brown earth.

The gash was there before him. It was true—his own eyes told him it was true, and the screams and excited shouts about him confirmed it. Still his reasoning brain could not accept the fact.

Men! Two hundred or more! And now only this great ditch! He found himself trying to comprehend it in engineering terms. Length, a half mile; width, a hundred feet. Thousands of tons—hundreds of thousands of tons—gone! Clean gone! But the power that had done the work of a whole battery of steam shovels and had done it in the fraction of a split second was something that the flashing thoughts of James Blaine, engineer, could not name.

The din of voices grew. Beside Blaine a fat man labored for breath, while he managed to shout: "No! I tell you, no! Destruction of mat-

ter—impossible! I am Galeton—I am a physicist—I tell you it is not true!” He was staring at the great raw wound while he denied it.

A voice cried shrilly: “The judgment of a just God! Prepare to meet——” The mob voice drowned him out.

From all quarters, black figures of men came running. The man Galeton protested: “Dreaming! They’re all dreaming! Mass hypnosis!” A big man, bull-necked and stolid, faced him and roared an answer to them all:

“To hell with your hypnoses! It’s gone! I saw it! It’s gone, and it ain’t falling down on us again! The damndest, queerest explosion I ever——”

His bellowing voice rose and cracked shrilly. Far down the paved parkway, police sirens screamed—grew louder. The voice of the mob was stilled.

Blaine, dazed and bewildered, still only half believing, made his way through the throng. But he was repeating as he went: “‘It’s gone,’ and it ain’t falling down on us again!” The big boy had it right. Thousands of tons—hundreds of men—gone! Just like that!”

But even the flick of his finger that unconsciously illustrated the quickness of that going seemed slow.

IN THE office of President Brewster of Allied Engineers, the president’s desk was strewn with newspapers. Each carried a screaming banner, no two of them alike.

Mystery Blast! Giant Meteor! Atomic Disintegration, Scientist Claims. And one even dared: Bombardment From Space! What Next? Is New York Doomed?

This paper printed under another heading a quarter column that

Blaine scanned hastily. He caught the high points of the story and repeated them aloud:

“Rain of reptiles following Park disaster—small reptilian creatures a foot in length—from the sky near Pelham Manor—some still living—new species—slim, pointed heads, six legs, tails covered with red scales——”

President Brewster, seated at his desk, said:

“Poppycock!”

“It has happened before”—Blaine was arguing as much with himself as with Brewster—“strange animals, bits of stone falling from the sky.”

“Impossible! Now this Park matter——”

“Is impossible, too,” said Blaine. “And the papers are all wrong, unless this atomic-disintegration theory is the answer. No, I can’t even make a guess—but I can tell you one interesting fact. Portrero——”

He paused as the door from an adjoining office opened. In the doorway stood Mr. Brewster’s secretary, Gordon van Dent.

Van Dent, a former favorite of society until his millionaire father, losing his millions, died while cleaning a convenient revolver, had retained his social graces together with a certain insolence that had seemed especially marked toward Blaine. Now, impeccably attired, he smiled slightly at sight of Blaine’s clothes, stained and muddied.

Blaine said briefly, “Hello, Van,” then continued:

“One fact, Mr. Brewster—Portrero won’t bother you any more. Portrero was the head man of that crowd in the Park. Portrero’s gone.”

From Van Dent, still in the doorway, came a sound of one quick-drawn breath, almost a gasp of dis-

may. He reached for the door jamb for support, while sudden pallor swept his face and his broad shoulders seemed sagging.

He must have sensed the inquiring looks, for he stammered: "The accident! Terrible—mysterious—it has unnerved me! But about Portrero—are you sure?"

Blaine answered: "I was looking right at him. It was Port. We don't know what hit him, but he got his, and no mistake." He looked sharply at Van Dent. "Does it matter to you particularly?" he asked.

Brewster broke in, elation only half concealed in his voice:

"So Portrero is eliminated! Well, we won't hang any crape on the door for that. Ever since we let him out a year ago he has been threatening us, and we couldn't lay hands on him. You knew he tried to queer you with us, Blaine—gave us false reports on your alloys for the Metropole job. That was why we threw him out."

"I knew," said Blaine.

Brewster nodded curtly. He said in dismissal: "That's all, Blaine. A terrible accident, but it's not our job to find the answer. And as for Portrero—" He did not need to finish the sentence.

Back in his own laboratory, Blaine's men were running routine analyses of his new steels; test sections were being torn apart in the jaws of big machines; the men were going about their work as if the world held no mysteries outside their own test tubes.

Blaine drew a breath of relief; all this was helping him to regain his poise. Steelwork was being fabricated for the world's greatest bridge, and he must check the analyses of every run of metal before it was rolled or drawn. The work must go on.

But he took time some days later to drive out to the Museum of Natural History. A news item told him that some of the little reptiles found at Pelham Manor had been brought there. The same account carried the usual explanation.

Many times before, frogs and worms and strange stones unlike any in the vicinity where they fell had apparently come from the sky. Innumerable instances could be cited. And always the explanation was the same: they had been swept up in a terrific windstorm in some distant part of the earth, then carried swiftly in the winds of the upper levels. Always the same explanations; but for some persons they had failed to explain.

At the Museum Blaine found specimens of the strange creatures in alcohol. Others were being prepared for mounting. An affable and assured scientist told him:

"No possible connection with the catastrophe in the Park. That was just a sample of Sunday-newspaper science." He was passing on to familiar phrases about whirlwinds and waterspouts when Blaine interrupted.

"I wouldn't be too positive about that," he said, and looked at the reptiles, that were like nothing he could conceive of except diminutive specimens of monsters from some prehistoric age. "You're apt to be embarrassed," he explained. "Some one might ask you in what part of the world we find things like that."

"But, my dear Blaine, what other source? Impossible!"

Blaine smiled wearily. Near by a window allowed a view of Central Park. His eyes were on something out there as he said:

"And I'd be a bit cautious about that word. Out there the other day I saw one impossibility occur. I'm

beginning to think we'll have to be careful how we speak about impossibilities."

The man beside him made no reply. Like Blaine, he was staring from the window. In the distance a great gash was like a raw wound of clotted brown in the expanse of green.

II.

MYSTERY! Catastrophe! Sudden tragedy! Even these are soon lost in the roaring voice of a great city. And even Blaine learned to forget as the crowding days rushed past—days in which a tremendous structure took shape under the magic spinning of human spiders who swung slender strands in a graceful sweep from high towers on either side of the river.

But the days had themselves been spun by time into nearly two unbelievable years when Blaine, his throat tight with emotion, saw the great bridge near completion.

Perhaps it was not work alone that had contributed to the swift passing of those days. Certainly no small part of Blaine's thoughts had been turned into other channels.

She stood beside him now, the object of those thoughts. Small wonder that workmen turned to stare at the exquisitely beautiful face of Sylvia Brewster; many others, more blasé than they, had checked their swift pace in a city of busy men and beautiful women for a second look at this daughter of Horatio Brewster. But, for the instant, Blaine had forgotten even her; his eyes followed the sweeping curve of those cables—his cables! An Irish foreman, approaching, coughed and repeated a question before Blaine knew he was there.

"'Tis a dom funny thing, Mr.

Blaine—beggin' the lady's pardon. One of the boys saw it hit, an' he went an' dug it up. Straight down it was comin'; an' what kind of metal it is, maybe y'rself can tell." Then Blaine saw that the foreman was holding a gray metal sphere in his outstretched hand.

He took it. The ball was only some three inches in diameter, but his hand sagged abruptly under the weight. The little ball was astoundingly heavy.

"An' now," the foreman begged, "would you open it? It come apart when it hit an' buried itself in the ground. There's writin' that you'd best keep to y'rself."

Blaine looked up sharply at the man. A little side glance of shrewd Irish eyes toward Sylvia Brewster told Blaine who must be kept in ignorance of the mysterious writing. He stared in puzzled wonder at the gray ball for one long minute before he lifted the upper half that had been held by a metal band. The band had burst upon impact.

He reached for a folded paper inside the sphere; he was weighing and considering a whole series of wild surmises as to what it might mean. But of them all, not one was so incredible as the words that stared up at him boldly.

"Brewster," the message began; then: "You damned, money-gorged swine——"

No initials. The writer of the words must have been sure of their reaching the one person of that name for whom they were meant. Blaine read on:

"This is not a warning. I am just telling you. I am going to get your big bridge. I'm going to knock about fifty million of your dollars into twisted scrap and dump it in the river. And then I'm going to get you.

"Think that over when you're walking around on the roof figuring new ways to rob honest men. Think hard, Brewster—you're clever—but you'll never think what I am going to do to you when I get you."

Savage anger surged through Blaine as he read; then that was wiped out by utter, wide-eyed amazement.

For only then did he read the signature. One word—"Portrero."

He read it again and again; it was exactly as he had seen it a thousand times in former days. Who could copy Portrero's hand, that signature almost illegible, but like no other writing in the world? Portrero had written that name! But Portrero was dead—dead! Hadn't he seen him vanish?

One thought followed another; Blaine reasoned clearly, and he answered his own question. He *had* seen Portrero vanish, shouting, scowling! But had he seen him die? Had he?

Abruptly he was aware that here was something he could not swear to.

"What is it, Jimmy?" Sylvia Brewster looked up at him with anxious eyes. And Blaine needed all his strength of will to force a laugh to his lips. Casually he said:

"Some idiot's idea of a practical joke. Airplanes give them a new means for proving their idiocy. He might have killed somebody with this."

He glanced at his watch in affected surprise. "Lord," he exclaimed, "but I've got to hurry! You know how your dad gets when he's kept waiting. I'll drop you wherever you say—"

He flashed one look at the foreman, a look sharp as any command. The Irishman clamped his lips together and nodded. He would be

silent. Blaine hurried the girl to the waiting car.

She must have found him poor company, singularly absent-minded and uncommunicative. And in spite of his hurry, he swung off and headed his car through Central Park. He even stopped at a point where he could see that big cut.

It was fenced off for public safety, but the cut itself had not been filled. Men still were studying it, searching the rocks for some clew as to its cause. But this time Blaine, staring at it silently, was seeing it in his mind as it had once been.

He was picturing a smooth expanse of green, a crowd of men like a black blot, and one who harangued them violently, then turned quickly to snarl epithets. Then all that vanished, and the place where Portrero and the others had been was only a raw gash in the earth!

Blaine reached to an inner pocket; he fingered the folded paper with its unmistakable signature. There had been mystery enough before; it was doubled now. For Portrero had written that message—Portrero, who had vanished in that silent obliteration and destruction!

Somehow, somewhere, Portrero was still alive!

III.

PRESIDENT BREWSTER of Allied Engineers was in conference with the heads of his publicity department when Blaine entered. Van Dent, Brewster's secretary, was there. Blaine offered no apology for his abrupt entrance. He told Brewster:

"I must talk with you at once. And this"—he glanced at the others and smiled grimly—"is not a matter for publicity."

Van Dent was the first to reply. He said coldly:

"The matter will need to be extremely important, Blaine, to warrant this intrusion. Come into my office and tell me——"

"I'll tell you plenty one of these days!" said Blaine curtly. Then to Brewster:

"I said once that Portrero wouldn't be threatening you again. I was wrong. Do you want to hear about it?"

He waited while the publicity experts left the room at a word from Brewster. Only Van Dent remained. Then Blaine placed the metal sphere on the president's desk. In brief sentences he told of the foreman's report. Then he opened the metal ball and spread the paper before Brewster.

"Portrero is alive," he said. "He's up to more deviltry. But don't ask me what it means. I saw him wiped out. If ever a man was blasted off the face of the earth, Port was that man. But look at that writing—that signature! We can't laugh that off."

Brewster was reading. The veins in his neck were like pieces of rope; his face grew livid. "What the devil——" He demanded: "What's the meaning of that?"

Van Dent had leaned over Brewster's shoulder. He read the message, straightened up, stared at Blaine. His lips twisted into a laugh.

"Crude!" he said. "Exceedingly crude!"

The clenching of Blaine's hands was entirely involuntary. He did not get the implications of Van Dent's words, but their insolent tone could not be mistaken. It was not the first time that he had wished that a hard, straight right into that complacently superior face was in

accordance with good office practice.

Brewster snapped: "Crude? Just what do you mean, Gordon?"

"Even Blaine might have constructed a better alibi," Van Dent explained. "His steel is in the Metropole Bridge. He is, let us assume, not entirely confident of its strength. So he prepares this absurd paper; he forges a dead man's name; plants it where it will be found. Then, if the Metropole fails under maximum load"—he shrugged his broad shoulders slightly—"I repeat that this is exceedingly crude."

An instant followed in which Jimmy Blaine stood motionless while the blood rushed darkly into his lean face, then subsided to leave it pale beneath its tan. There was another quick following second when he forgot his surroundings, forgot that he was in the beautiful private office of Horatio Brewster—when he saw nothing but that little supercilious smile on the face of Gordon van Dent. In that second he moved, crouched, shot forward, and his fists sounded a quick one-two with the thud that bare fists make on flesh.

Van Dent was on the floor. He rolled and came to his feet. His lips were bleeding; a trickle of red ran down across his waistcoat, down to the rich rug. Blaine was looking through a red haze that blocked out everything but the face of the man who had challenged his professional integrity. Then Brewster was between them, and his cold voice cut through that haze:

"Enough of that! Gordon, you asked for it, and you got it. Go and wash up! Blaine, you are removed temporarily from your position with this company. There will be an investigation." He held up the paper bearing what Van Dent

had termed a dead man's signature. "This will be submitted to handwriting experts. If they say it is genuine——"

"Well?" asked Blaine harshly. "What then?"

Brewster followed Van Dent to the door of an inner office. He turned to look at Blaine coldly, impersonally, before he replied:

"Then you will need to explain these facts. You were the only one who identified Portrero. You told us that he had been wiped out. Now you bring me this damnable, contemptible threat. The bridge——"

Blaine said: "Yes, the bridge—it will be opened a week from to-day. I would advise you to think about the bridge, Brewster!"

He was holding himself in restraint, trying to think clearly through the riot of conflicting thoughts within his own mind. It couldn't be genuine! It was a hoax! But who? Why? And abruptly there came to him one clear conviction.

Portrero had no hand in it, but the threat was real! The great Metropole was marked for destruction. His own professional reputation would go down with it, but that was nothing beside the thousands of lives that might be snuffed out.

He burst forth savagely:

"For God's sake, man, can't you see that I don't know any more about it than you do? Call it a fake—call it anything you please! But——"

Brewster cut in: "It's too late for that, Blaine. The first 'o' in this signature contains a little dot. It is Portrero's mark. He used it on important papers. Not many knew of it. The signature is genuine."

Still Blaine clung to his one clear thought. "Guard the bridge!" he

said. "Dead or alive, Port means trouble. You're poison to him. He'll stop at nothing. Don't play him for a fool. Guard the bridge!"

"The bridge," said Brewster, "will be adequately guarded." He smiled wryly and delivered one parting shot before he closed the door:

"My first order will be for your immediate arrest if you so much as set foot on that structure."

ONE WEEK, and Blaine had for companionship only his own thoughts. And they led him only in the same bewildering circle.

What had hit Portrero? Whatever it was, Portrero was dead! But Brewster had identified the signature—Brewster was no man to be mistaken—— Why had he been unable to reach Sylvia? "Miss Brewster is not at home." He had seen her once at a distance, and Van Dent had been with her. Brewster said Port was alive—and Port was a dirty dog who would stop at nothing. Brewster was poison to him. The bridge——

Blaine watched the slow hours pass and promised himself satisfaction when it came time for a showdown. But always his thoughts went back to the bridge.

And then, when the week was gone, he found his mind surprisingly at ease.

He was not among the officials at the portal. He stood back where a rope and a cordon of police held the crowd in check. But he could see it all, and the sight of those gracefully sweeping curves where cables spanned the river, the clusters of eye-bars, the broad roadway, and the triple decks for their varying traffic, all served to fill him with a new assurance.

His steel was in every cable and

bar. He had tested it all. And the sight of countless uniformed men of the New York police brought further confidence.

But he would have liked to stand across there where Sylvia Brewster was one of a laughing group. Only the merest fragment of his fears stayed with him and made him glad that the opening ceremony was held at the New York portal, not at the center of the bridge.

Brewster was there, and Van Dent, too. Sylvia was beside her father. Tall and slender, dressed all in white, her lovely face under its trim hat was lifted to him with the quick, smiling camaraderie that Blaine loved. They moved forward where the roadway was barred by a barrier, swung like the cables from the great towers—but this was no alloy steel; only a ribbon of shimmering silk.

A man in a uniform marked with gold braid handed the girl a sword. She took it. Blaine saw it flash in the air. He heard her voice, clear and softly modulated, in the sudden hush of the throng. He saw her face. And to Blaine it seemed as if that shining sword was about to cut more than a strand of ribbon. It seemed rather to symbolize his being cut off from all that he held dear. Van Dent had won Brewster's favor; and Sylvia would believe what was told her about Blaine.

"—for the use of the public," Sylvia's voice was announcing. Blaine tore his eyes away. He looked far off at the distant towers where the cables ended across the river. Again he heard the girl:

"I now declare the Metropole Bridge open——"

Blaine never saw the fall of the flashing sword—for in that instant those distant towers vanished. Be-

tween him and the opposite shore an invisible veil had dropped. He saw it come down, saw it block the far end of the bridge from sight, saw it touch the great span——

All in the merest instant of time. Then the air was shrill with sound. Beneath his feet the landward approach of the bridge swayed and shuddered. Giant cables, released of their load, slashed like enormous whips; the air screamed and shrieked as the cables ripped and lashed. Human voices rose in a pandemonium of screaming shouts; they blended hideously with the groans of tortured steel and the thunderous impact of gigantic girders! All in an instant that seemed an age. And Blaine, stupefied, staring, clung to an eye-bar hanger for support while he saw the great central span, sliced cleanly through, dropping with horrible slowness to the river, hundreds of feet beneath.

The crashing turmoil carried an overtone keen with terror. It ended. Then came silence more dreadful still. And Blaine still stood and stared at the place where the bridge had been, at the pallid faces of men, and at the slender figure of a girl, all in white, who had just dedicated the vanished structure to the use of a waiting people.

But, like searing lightning within his brain, one thought repeated itself over and over:

"It's the same thing that hit Port! It's the same thing that ripped the Park! But this was aimed—and Port did it! Portrero——"

IV.

ONE STORMY interview with President Brewster netted Blaine little. Brewster was hostile.

"There's fifty million dollars in the river, Blaine. But the dollar

loss we can write off; it's the damage to the prestige of the Allied that is not easily taken care of."

"All right," Blaine said; "where do I come in on that?"

"You come in, Blaine. Now, get this. The bridge failed. There was no fault in design or construction; our stress sheets have been verified. It was faulty material that did it! And I'll tell you one thing more.

"Your analyses are being checked. All the material you condemned is being traced. Somebody has made it worth your while to let them fabricate some off-grade steel. And when we find it, you will wish you were down there in the river under the wreckage!"

Only the cold glint in Blaine's eyes told of the effort to hold his voice level. He said: "Check all you damn please—that's fair enough. But the materials were right—every pound of them. Now let me tell you something.

"I was watching the bridge. I guess I was the only one who was. I wasn't looking at anything—but I saw something! I saw it happen!

"Something came down, Brewster. Something invisible! And you can take that damned cynical smile off your face, too. I saw it. It smashed the bridge—cut it in two! No, of course I don't know what it was. If I did, do you think I would stand here and take that line of talk from you? But I'll tell you who was back of it. It was Portrero!"

At mention of the name, Horatio Brewster's remnant of poise deserted him. He shouted:

"Portrero! Portrero be damned! Van Dent had it right! You and Portrero framed up that threat. You were fools enough to think you could use that Park mystery to hoodwink us. I don't know what your game is, but you're through,

Blaine! I'll have a report on your work in two hours. Come back here then. And don't try to run out on us. You don't know it, but I've had you watched."

Blaine laughed grimly. "I spotted your flatfoot two days ago," he said. "Get your report. It will give me a clean bill of health. I'll do the talking then."

He went to the elevators; a man entered one with him. Blaine said: "You're tailing me? All right, stick around. We're going for a walk." Then he tramped the streets blindly until the two hours were gone.

He was through; there was no least doubt of that. One hint of suspicion from a man in Brewster's position and James Blaine, engineer and metallurgist, would find his profession closed to him for life. Nor was there any doubt in Blaine's mind but that Van Dent would manage to have that hint given. He was through!

Back in the Brewster building he was told: "Mr. Brewster will see you in his upper office." That meant the roof. Blaine took the elevator to the top.

Ninety stories above the street was Brewster's personal playground. Grass, shrubbery, graveled walks—it was all more like a suburban garden. Here Brewster was accustomed to take his daily stroll.

A small, tile-roofed building was there, too. It housed a luxuriously furnished private office that the president chose at times to use.

The office was empty when Blaine entered.

He walked to one of the wide windows that gave a view of the ocean. He crossed restlessly to another that looked out upon a velvety lawn with massed shrubbery beyond. On a side path two people were leisurely walking. Blaine's mind was

too tense with his own hot thoughts to pay immediate attention. Then Van Dent, with Sylvia Brewster beside him, walked out upon the turf.

Van Dent saw Blaine and laughed. The girl, dainty and fragile-looking in a frock of palest green, did not respond. She looked unsmilingly toward the window where Blaine stood.

"The alibi engineer!" Van Dent mocked. His words carried plainly. He looked down as if expecting the girl's approval. Still she looked steadily, questioningly, toward Jim Blaine. Van Dent took her arm in a proprietary grasp.

A voice spoke at Blaine's shoulder. "They make a nice picture, do they not? I have great hopes of Gordon."

Blaine flung about to face Brewster.

Brewster was in a new mood. He smiled ingratiatingly. He was handsome, this tall, gray-haired president of the Allied Engineers.

He continued as Blaine turned: "I am glad to say, Blaine, that our check-up of your work has been satisfactory. There is nothing there to your discredit. But—ah—at the suggestion of certain of our officials who are not entirely satisfied, we are severing your connection with the company. We will give you a year's salary in advance, and——"

Blaine said in a tired voice: "Oh, can the drivel! Say what you mean! You need a goat, and you're electing me! You'll let me out, and every engineering outfit in the world will believe I was responsible for the crash."

Abruptly he faced away. So Van Dent had won; Van Dent had killed him with a more effective weapon than any devised for war. Sylvia would believe——

He was looking half blindly to-

ward that garden spot high above the city's clamor where two figures stood clear and stark against a background of verdant foliage. Above the high wall of greenery the face of a stone gargoyle leered mockingly at him. Blaine stared stonily back. All the world seemed mocking him in that moment.

Then—his breath caught quickly in his throat—the gargoyle had vanished!

It was gone. Between him and the ugly face a shimmering something had come. It came down—it was like a veil—it blotted out the green wall—it was settling swiftly and with deadly precision over two figures silhouetted sharply in the light of a brilliant sun!

Blaine shouted one cry of warning. He pulled himself through the open window—ran madly toward them. He even saw the look of startled amazement in Sylvia Brewster's eyes.

Then the nebulous nothingness enveloped them; it seemed to be flooding the green-turfed roof.

They were gone!

He checked his mad rush. He was balancing precariously on a ragged edge where lawn and roof and steel framing had been carried away. In the Brewster building was a gash that had ripped a full two stories below.

Brewster was at his side. "She's gone!" he screamed. "She's gone! Good God, Blaine, what does it mean!"

"Gone!" echoed Blaine. He looked about him and fought to control his thoughts. Ocean, mountains, innumerable buildings—all was as it had been.

He looked up. This thing had come from above. He saw fleecy clouds adrift in a clear blue sky. He heard himself speaking. It was

as if another self had arranged his wild thoughts into logical sequence. His voice was ugly with pain.

"You wouldn't listen to me before—but you'll listen now! It's Portrero, you poor, blind fool! You've played right into his hands! He hit the bridge with this thing—it's a new force of some sort—then he came after you. He got the wrong ones. I wish to Heaven it had been the one——"

He fell silent. Before him, Brewster was a stricken, trembling parody of his former self. He was shrunken and old. Blaine took him by the arm and led him back.

He drove back the men who swarmed from the building below. He took Brewster into the office. He must be alone. He must think. And when Brewster was able to comprehend his words, he said:

"It's all linked up. That first rip up in Central Park carried Portrero off just as"—he stopped for a minute to harden his voice—"just as Sylvia was taken. Whatever struck her took out part of the building exactly as it took the dirt and loose rock from the Park.

"Then came the warning. It was from Portrero, although none of us quite dared believe it then. He smashed the bridge. He threatened to get you. Remember, he even mentioned your habit of walking up here on the roof. He picked off Sylvia and Van Dent with his damn ray, or whatever it is, when he thought he was nailing you."

He shook Brewster's shoulder savagely as he said: "Portrero's alive! I'm a crazy fool to believe it! But we've got to believe it, Brewster! For if Portrero's alive, then Sylvia is alive, too. But if he's dead——"

"Sylvia," said Brewster in a voice sodden with despair, "is dead! She

has been destroyed before my very eyes! I cannot credit your wild theories, Blaine—God knows I would like to believe!—but she is gone! My little girl—Sylvia! And there is nothing that can be done."

Brewster staggered as Blaine flung him aside. Blaine snatched at a telephone and shouted a number. To Brewster he said curtly: "You'll O. K. everything I do!" Then:

"Construction department? . . . Get this! We want timbers, sheathing! . . . Here, I'll give you the sizes——" He snapped off a series of figures. "Prepared roofing. Sod—fresh sod, fresh and green! Have it up here in thirty minutes!" More quantities; an order for a crew of men. Then Blaine put the telephone down.

Brewster's eyes had come to life, but he said: "You are insane!"

"I think so," Blaine agreed. "I'm insane enough to believe there's a man's mind behind this. Some one directed that force to the center of the Metropole's span. Some one sent it reaching down—down—till it touched this roof. He knows what he's doing. He's watching. But he may not have seen us out there. I'm gambling on that."

"Go on!" Brewster ordered.

"He doesn't know that you know about Sylvia. Here's what he sees: You come up here—the roof is damaged—you order it repaired at once. You are mystified—you go out there after it's all fixed up—you stand in the same place, the exact spot where it hit before."

Brewster shook his head. "Utterly insane!" he said.

Blaine said: "Absolutely! No sane man would do this!"

But not for another hour did Horatio Brewster, president of Allied Engineers, understand where Jim Blaine's plans were leading.

Again they were alone. They looked from the same window upon an expanse of green much as it had been before. Brewster was moving in a daze; he was near collapse, his eyes dull, his face sagging. He started toward the door opening out to the garden. Blaine jerked him back.

"You stay here!" Blaine said. "Now snap out of it. Tell me where you go as a usual thing. Where do you walk? Where do you stand?"

Comprehension came slowly, but at last Brewster said: "You would impersonate me? You think—you really think—" He placed a trembling but friendly hand on Blaine's arm.

"You don't need to do that, Blaine," he said. "I know now to my own sorrow that you were in no way responsible for the other disaster. The Allied organization will see—"

Blaine snarled impatiently: "To hell with the Allied! Do you think I'm doing this to square myself with them or you? What's ahead of me, God knows—but Sylvia's gone, and I'm going, too!"

He was bareheaded, his sandy hair in a tangle. He fumbled as he reached for Brewster's pearl-gray hat. At mention of Sylvia's name, his eyes had grown misty. He looked away. His blurring eyes made the shrubbery outside indistinct; it brought again the picture of that other invisible veil. He jammed the hat on his head.

"Not much of a disguise," he said huskily; "but if he's looking from above—and perhaps he can't see details."

Brewster, gripping Blaine's hand, said: "I can't believe it. But I know now why you're doing it. Sylvia! I've been blind! We old fellows get that way sometimes."

Blaine sprang toward the door; then he forced himself to a slow walk. Once outside, a fever of impatience possessed him, but he kept himself to something like Brewster's leisurely gait as he paced back and forth.

At last he moved out upon the fresh-laid sod. He stood there as Brewster might have stood, puzzling over this mystery blast, or contemplating the ocean's vast expanse—or, as Portrero's message had said: "Figuring new ways to rob honest men."

Each minute was an age in passing, and each brought to Blaine a growing certainty of his own folly. There was the ocean, vastly blue; the countless roofs and towers of the metropolis were about him. Only a fool or a madman would think that another human, possessed of strange powers, could reach into the heart of the city and blast flesh and steel into oblivion. Certainty of failure was heavy upon him. Sylvia was gone! The busy world, whose echoes came faintly to his ears, was a dreary and desolate place.

One sharp cry broke in upon his dismal thoughts. It was Brewster—he was leaning from the window—he was shouting:

"The gargoyle! It's gone, Blaine! The trees—"

The wild cry went dead, and the city's roar—all was swallowed up in an overwhelming silence. Blaine, in an instant, was cut off from all sound. And in the same instant the whole world changed.

About him there was abruptly a spectral city, where every roof and tower glowed faintly—phantom structures, luminous, and ghostly. Like Brewster, running wildly toward him, like the place where he stood, all were unreal.

Then even this phantom of the world he had known left him. He was bathed in a vertical beam of light; the spectral world fell away from beneath his feet; he was caught up into the nothingness of space—

The light blinded him. Shrieking winds tore and beat at him from every side. But the world—the world of substance and reality—was gone! And he was alone, drawn up through that blinding light.

V.

FLASHING impressions were beating upon Blaine's mind, but no human brain could be geared to receive them. In a single instant he was standing upon the broad, turfed roof—Brewster was calling, dragging himself awkwardly through the window—then the blinding light, and a city turned to dim, luminous masses that vanished in the instant that he saw them.

He had no sense of movement. It was as if he had stood still while all the world was hurled from sight. Dimly, through the tremendous impact of new sensations and emotions, he was trying to reason through to some solid fact. He found it in the knowledge that worlds are not casually tossed aside; and he knew that he was moving, that he had been snatched into space as surely as if this vertical light were a great suction tube.

Beside him, turning slowly in air, were sod and earth and torn fragments of roofing. The whirling blasts of wind drove them against him—they were solid! A splintered board whipping against his face brought a stab of pain. Blaine reveled in the hurt. He had fact number two—he was alive!

Reason returned. His mind was

working at lightning speed, but his thoughts seemed slow. Laboriously he fitted them together.

He had been hurled from the earth. By centrifugal force? No; he had been shot straight up! Negative gravitation? That was it—when that light touched him, gravitation had ceased. Some force must have repelled him—shot him out as if a blast of high explosive had let go! Then how could he be alive? No human organism could survive an acceleration like that.

The answer came quickly. The inert matter beside him, the sod and boards and timbers, had not been disrupted; they had merely torn free. And as for himself, if every atom of his body—not every cell, but every atom—were acted upon instantly by the same force, no particle of flesh or blood would sense the motion.

He was still arguing within himself, still trying to rationalize his new sensations, when a dark mass loomed above his head. It was like a roof in which one single point was a blaze of light. The vertical ray came from that point. He was being drawn up to it—into it!

He was inside a great cone hollowed from solid rock, an inverted crater. He was rising less swiftly—he even saw the rough walls of the crater drawing close. Then, like a human projectile, he struck the circle of light above and shot through it, on and up into a bewildering brilliance.

A moment of that and he was falling, turning as he fell. He saw ground below, or rock—black, shining rock. Immediately beneath him was a big disk of gray. It was round; its sides were sloping; it might be a roof—or the top of some giant mushroom. He was falling upon it, not too swiftly—

He struck, breathless and dazed. Sod and wreckage rained down about him. With the débris he rolled helplessly down the slope; over its edge; down to the rocky ground below. Landing on his feet, he wavered, then toppled backward underneath the big circular shelter and took one last fall into a rocky pit beneath.

He lay motionless, sick from the succession of jarring shocks. He had no slightest comprehension of what it all meant. Then the clang of metal on metal thundered in the confines of the pit—thundered com-fortingly. Above, where the great canopy roof was above the pit's edge, light poured in. Blaine drew a gasping breath.

Air, soft and warm, was about him. A new odor, pungently pleasant, was wafted in. Air and light! He clung tenaciously to that one fact he had proved before. He was alive! He was himself! With that he came slowly and unsteadily to his feet.

Little effort was needed. He found himself nearly weightless, and told himself that that was why the fall had not killed him. Slowly his eyes took in the details of his surroundings.

His first impression had been right; he was in a pit. It was circular. On the rock wall was a metal stairway; it led up to the pit's edge, where he had staggered under the projecting roof. Then the roof claimed his attention.

He saw now that it was flatly conical, like a parasol. From above it had appeared metallic; now it was translucent. Light came through it as it might through dull glass, brightly at the lower edge, increasingly dull toward the top. He could not see the apex of the cone; a central structure blocked it off.

That structure was square, box-like. It was a central core, a great square pillar, that reached from the floor to the apex of the roof, forty feet above. He saw that it was built of gray metal plates, the side nearest him about twenty feet across, and he knew that it was a room, a housing inclosing something unknown. Here must be the heart of the mystery!

With the thought came the crash and clang of a door being thrown open on the farther side.

Silence had filled the pit. Now it echoed resoundingly with clattering sound. Again silence—and, at last, a voice:

"Come around here, Brewster! Come here, damn you! I've got a lot to say to you before you get yours!"

And, though Blaine had long since ceased to doubt the existence of the man, the remembered snarling voice of Portrero came with a startling shock of surprise.

Portrero! Portrero had called! And he still thought it was Brewster hidden behind that central core!

Blaine drew one long breath. His knees still trembled from the jerking of muscles not yet under control, and his body, so curiously light, was difficult to manage; but he walked slowly across the rocky floor and circled that central room.

He was looking for Portrero. He found no one. Was this more mystery? More magic? Then he saw a second stairway against the metal wall of that central box. It led high up; at its top was a door. Blaine, standing below, stared upward through that door into an upper room.

He could see the roof, the apex of the cone. It was open; it made a circle of brilliant light that drew

shut as he watched, closing like the diaphragm of a camera. He saw other things: a framework; in it a telescope hung pointing down. His mind flashed back to bring him recollections of Central Park. The old man with the telescope—yes, his instrument had been like that.

Then Blaine had no further thoughts of such things. From the doorway a figure sprang—a man who shouted exultantly as he leaped down the stairway. He landed directly in front of Blaine, facing him.

It was Portrero. His dark face was twisted into lines half of scowling ferocity, half malice and triumph. Then that expression changed. Portrero stammered:

"Brewster! You—you aren't Brewster! Why, damn you, Blaine! How did you get here?"

That changing face—the astonishment and disgust—almost Blaine could have laughed had laughter been possible. But the man's actual presence acted like a cold shower on Blaine. Bewilderment vanished; he was himself again. He answered Portrero's question with a volley of his own.

"Where is Sylvia Brewster? Where is Van Dent? Where are we all? What the devil does this mean? I saw you wiped off the map two years ago!"

Portrero was in no condition to answer. The swarthiness of his face flushed blood-red with passionate hatred. He raised his clenched fists and waved them wildly in air. Snarling like an animal, his lips writhing, he mouthed an endless succession of foulness and profanity. But mixed with the shouted epithets were disjointed phrases that Blaine found illuminating.

"Brewster—damn him! A curse to the whole earth! All my life he

rode me! Every dirty, rotten thing that ever came my way was his doing! Persecution—grinding me down! Grinding every honest workingman to dust! The whole system, and he was the head of it, grinding us! Grinding us! But I'll get him yet, and then——"

Blaine, in his own mind, said: "A maniac! Paranoia—delusions of persecution. And that means that Port's clever as the devil in every other way!"

Again his thoughts flashed to Sylvia. A helpless girl; and she had come this way—she had passed through this maniac's hands! He took one forward step, questions hot on his lips. A voice checked him.

The first stairway he had seen was still in sight. At its top, on the rim of the pit, beneath the overhang of the roof, was a man. He was indistinguishable against the glare of that outer world, but the voice identified him.

It was the voice of Gordon van Dent.

"Did you get him?" Van Dent called. "Good work! I've got the girl where she'll be safe. Gorsk will see to that. Bring the old man up."

Van Dent was peering downward, his eyes not yet adjusted to the gloom of the pit. Blaine sensed his new danger. A madman to deal with. Van Dent plainly an enemy. Above them in that room a mysterious device that could work devastating destruction! But Van Dent had spoken of "the girl." Sylvia was safe! The knowledge gave Blaine new life.

He leaped for the stairway in one great bound. His strength was prodigious now that his weight was gone. He sprang to the top. Van Dent fell back. "Blaine!" he shouted.

Blaine hardly heard. He was

looking about him, trying to see all at once, staring at a new world, weird and unreal.

Portrero's mechanism was on a hillside, but a hillside such as Blaine had never seen. Black rock, smooth and glassy, reached down and away in a gentle slope; it carried Blaine's startled gaze on to a line of pink crystal crags that thrust themselves out of the black. Still farther was a welter of rocky forms of kaleidoscope colorings, heaved and broken as if by earthquakes.

Beyond all, showing distinctly through the clear air, a range of mountains seemed painted across the landscape by some mad master of the brush, driven insane by his passion for color. Crystal-white, dazzlingly brilliant; and, slashed through them, were bands of crimson and orange and black. One whole mountain was the purple of manganese.

At first Blaine could see nothing but the colorful desolation. Then came comprehension of the clearness of it all, and of the flood of light that bathed it. He looked up.

No sun! No sky of blue, nor sign of clouds. The whole vault of the heavens was one radiant, glowing expanse of golden light. There was no central source; it came from everywhere; it enveloped this strange world in soft brilliance. And to Blaine, in that moment, it seemed as if the same radiance poured warmly through every atom of his body.

He came to himself with a start. Portrero had followed him. Van Dent, shouting questions, was at Portrero's side. Portrero, beginning again his reiteration of obscenities, included Blaine in his denunciations. Blaine, too, it would seem, had been persecuting him.

But Van Dent, thought Blaine—

at least Van Dent was sane! He might know something of the answer to all this. He might be willing to help—weren't they all in the same wild mess? Perhaps he could be won over!

"For Heaven's sake," Blaine shouted, "tell me, Van: Sylvia! You and I! Where are we?"

Van Dent's customary complacency had left him. He glanced once at Portrero, who had taken to pacing back and forth across the smooth rock. There was furtive fear in that glance, though Van Dent tried to hide it.

"I don't know," he said in a low tone. Again he shot a sidelong look at the pacing, muttering man. "Damned if I know! He brought us here, but he's laying for Brewster. He promised that Sylvia and I would be sent back as soon as he got the old man. But I can tell you one thing; he's planning to raise hell down below on the earth."

"Below?" Here was Blaine's first indication of any definiteness in their location. "You mean we're up in the air—up above the world? But that can't be. It's impossible! This is solid ground we're on—a whole world of it here. It couldn't have existed without our knowing it!"

"Hell!" Van Dent retorted. "Don't you suppose I know it? I'm only telling you what he says; I've only been here a couple of hours. He talked some at first—he said we're a hundred miles up in space, over the earth. But now that he's picked you off——"

Van Dent paused. He eyed Blaine through narrowed lids. Abruptly he burst out:

"Damn you, Blaine! You did it on purpose! You saw us get wiped out. You knew he was after Brewster. And he'd have had the old

man this minute if you hadn't butted in! He'd have sent me back! You've gummed that all up!"

Portrero's pacing had reached an end. He stood listening, his black eyes regarding Blaine wickedly. Again his lips, that never ceased their writhing, drew back. Through yellowed teeth he snarled:

"The fool's right! You dirty sneak, you got me fired once! And now—but you won't last long this time! You're the one that's going back, but they'll pick up what's left of you with a blotter! You'll be going plenty when you hit!"

His hands were clenching and opening rapidly; his eyes held a cold, maniacal fury. The ugly look on the broader, heavier face of Van Dent was no more promising. Blaine glanced quickly about. He must find some place where he could take them one at a time.

Back of the two threatening figures was smooth rock. A hundred yards farther the surface was broken into heaped-up, massed fragments. Abruptly Blaine knew that he had been seeing motion among those rocks. He had been only half aware; now he saw eyes staring at him. Then the human menace before him was forgotten at sight of a repulsive reptilian head.

It was above the stones. It shot higher; a long neck held it ten feet in air. A toothed beak opened and closed clatteringly. Blaine, transfixed with horror, saw an enormous body, leathery wings that snapped out wide.

Then Portrero was upon him.

Blaine was caught off guard. The madman's nails tore at him; his arms gripped with maniacal strength. And across the black rock a great beast flapped its wings—ran clumsily—soared into the air! It circled in one swift curve. The air was

vibrant with its shrill scream as it darted upon them!

Van Dent had turned—the look on Blaine's face must have warned him. He threw himself headlong toward the pit. Portrero's fist was swinging. It crashed against the side of Blaine's head. Then even to Portrero's mad brain that shrill scream must have penetrated.

Blaine spun backward under the impact of that blow. He fell, lay motionless on the rock. He saw Portrero hurl himself in a headlong dive into the pit as a shrieking thing with flailing leather wings drove past in a whirlwind of fetid air.

It whirled in awkward contortions in midair, then came driving down. Blaine was too far from the pit; he lay motionless and waiting. Again the stench of the brute's body was in his nostrils—then again the thing swept past. It went on and up. At terrific speed it tore away through the golden sky.

Blaine had been half stunned. Now he could move, and the fight had only begun. He pulled himself to his feet. A new plan flashed full born to his mind. Portrero and Van Dent, down in the pit, could not have seen his escape. Here was a chance.

In tremendous bounds, but in perfect silence on the smooth stone, he ran toward the rocks where the reptile had been. If the beast could hide there, why not a man?

He was peering through a narrow gap in the stones when Portrero and Van Dent reappeared.

Their voices came to him plainly. "It got him!" Van Dent shouted. "What a finish for a man to meet!"

But Portrero shook a clenched fist after the speck that vanished as they watched. He ground out his words savagely. "The lucky sneak! The damn, lucky sneak!"

"Lucky!" Van Dent's exclamation was sheer amazement. "Is that your idea of luck up here in this rotten place, to be grabbed off and eaten by a thing like that?"

With the quick, emotional transition of the paranoiac, Portrero no longer raged, but said coldly: "You're devilish right he was lucky. Beside what I would have given him, that's just a picnic he's gone on. And you'll get what I had for him if you don't do as I say, Van Dent. Now we'll find Gorsk and the girl. I don't know as I'm so damn keen on having Brewster's brat up here, either!"

Blaine watched them go. Down the black, glossy slope; across the incredible pink of the crags; then on toward a hidden area where mountain masses of colored rock hid their tiny figures from view. Then he stood erect and motionless while he noted the direction in which they had gone. After that he looked slowly about at a world whose mystery and unreality seemed battering at his own sanity.

"It's a dream!" he said dully. "It's all a nightmare!"

His own voice, in that emptiness, mocked him. The vast silence of that painted, desolate world was pounding in his ears. Yet surely it was hallucination! Sylvia—she was safe at home! She was nowhere in this wild place in the grip of two men he had seemed to see! Dreaming—dreaming!

Out of that overpowering silence came a dry rustling. It was near his feet. He looked down.

At one side was a glassy fragment of rock. Above its sharp edge a tiny head was peering; a wriggling body followed. It scuttled across the stone, while its scales rustled dryly.

And Blaine stood unmoving

while he stared hopelessly at the little reptile—at its tiny, pointed head, its six legs, and red, scale-covered tail. It was the same as he had seen before.

It was the creature that had rained down in hundreds outside the city of New-York!

With a certainty that was sickening, he knew at last he was facing ghastly reality. Here was where the creatures had come from. And he, Jimmy Blaine, was here—he and Sylvia Brewster—a hundred miles in the air! It couldn't be true—but it was true! Another world—incredible—impossible—but horribly, damnably real!

VI.

BLAINE TOOK the hillside of glassy black rock on the run. He fell awkwardly a dozen times before he learned to manage his nearly weightless body. But out there across that barren waste, out among that welter of rainbow-hued rocks, Portrero and Van Dent had vanished. Out there somewhere Sylvia Brewster, terrified and helpless, was a prisoner.

He had been more than half in a daze; events had followed one another too swiftly for him to take their pace. Now all that was gone. It was Blaine, chemist and materials engineer; Blaine himself, thinking clearly once more, who leaped and fell and scrambled to his feet and threw himself forward again across a rocky waste land.

He came to the range of crags that had ripped up at some earlier time through the surface. A road wound among them. Wheel marks showed in the dirt. He followed the road.

Sudden, convulsive shaking of the rocks sent him sprawling. A boul-

der above him tore loose and crashed down. Instinctively he raised his hands—the rock only bruised him as his hands broke its fall. He got to his feet, smiling grimly. New lands! New matter! New rules! He had a lot of science to learn over. But Port had learned it—Port was using it. That put it squarely up to him.

He came out upon fairly level ground, where the road he was following joined another, better traveled. This new road came in from the direction of those distant crystal mountains; it swung off to the right along the base of precipitous cliffs, vanishing around a black, glassy pinnacle. Blaine hesitated a moment, then chose the route to the right. He must see what lay beyond. Cautiously he rounded the curve, then threw himself down behind a heap of rocks. Before him, in plain sight, was his goal.

He saw a valley, vividly green with vegetation. At its center was a little lake, golden with reflected light. Near the water was a cluster of square, boxlike shelters. Men moved there; sounds of loud laughter and hoarse shouts drifted across. Yet here, in this place where every unexplained thing might be of vital importance—or might mean nothing—was more mystery.

Across the valley floor was what might have been a roadway where giants traveled. Fifty feet in width, it ran straight and true for at least a mile. It was made of gray metal sheets laid end to end. On either side the valley's rank growth had been beaten flat.

Mystery—but Blaine passed it up for the moment. His gaze came back to the cluster of rude shelters. Was Sylvia Brewster hidden there? He ran from rock to rock until he reached the lush growth of the val-

ley floor. Then, creeping cautiously, he worked to within a hundred yards of the buildings.

Open ground was beyond. Men, forty or fifty of them, moved about. They were unkempt and bearded, with bodies that were nearly naked or wrapped in tattered remnants of clothing.

Portrero and Van Dent appeared suddenly.

To Blaine it seemed years since he had stood on the Brewster building and had seen Sylvia and Van Dent snatched away. Now, so simple a thing as Van Dent's clean-shaven face brought realization to him. Only hours had passed—he might still be in time. But was Sylvia here? Where had they hidden her? Portrero, himself, answered the question.

"Gorsk!" Portrero shouted out. "Bring her out, Gorsk! We'll have a look at Brewster's brat!"

In the open doorway of one of the shelters a big, bearded man turned and lumbered inside. He reappeared—and Blaine, hiding, holding himself motionless, dug his fingers into the ground in a frenzy. For Gorsk had one of Sylvia Brewster's arms in his grip and was jerking her roughly after him.

He came up to Portrero. Van Dent took one step forward, then stopped. Gorsk's grip must have slackened, for the girl wrenched free and sprang to Van Dent's side. Blaine saw her eyes wide with horror in a face pale and bloodless. But it was Sylvia, still in the pale-green frock as he had seen her last, though the dress now was ripped and torn.

"Gordon!" she was entreating. "Help me, Gordon! These brutes—who are they, Gordon? What does it all mean?"

Van Dent licked his full, sensuous lips. He looked from Portrero

to the girl, and back again at Portrero. Portrero, grinning, answered for him with exaggerated courtesy.

"My dear Miss Brewster, you must not ask too much of your little boy friend—really, you must not."

He swung back savagely to Van Dent.

"How about it? Do you want to start anything with me? Maybe you've switched over to the Brewster side since the time when you and I tried to run some bum steel into the Metropole job—make it fail under full load—clean up a million apiece selling Allied short. How about it, Van Dent?"

But Van Dent only licked his lips. He looked at Portrero, glanced once toward the girl, then stared down at the ground. Portrero spat contemptuously.

Others had crowded around. With them came five or six slatternly, half-naked creatures, huge caricatures of women, taller by two feet than the men. They must have come from the shelters, though Blaine had not noticed. Portrero sent his open hand cracking against one flabby, loose-lipped face.

"Get your damn moon-faced she-cattle out of here!" he roared. "And you, Gorsk, keep this girl out of the men's shacks. Take her over to mine, and keep your hands off her when you get there, too, or I'll put you under the block in a second!"

To Sylvia Brewster, facing him defiantly, he was still insolently polite. Blaine's brain seemed whirling as he saw her brave fight for courage. Portrero told her:

"You'd better forget about Gordon. You can see who's the big boss around here. And you'd better start practicing to be nice to me—you'll learn how before I'm through with you!"

Gorsk's hands seized her and led her toward another of the shelters set apart from the rest. Blaine forced himself to think through his red rage.

No mistaking what this meant—and he was one against a hundred. Van Dent could be counted out. He was alone. He could reach Sylvia; he could die fighting at her side—it seemed to be the only thing. But that wouldn't help her. He must think—think!

From behind him sounded a clanging clatter. He realized that he had been hearing it for some time. It had grown louder, and now it built up to a bedlam of jangling sound. He turned cautiously. The uproar was coming from the road.

Over a rise and down the slope a strange machine was approaching. Four wheels of solid metal; a platform of the same stuff—it might have been copper. On the platform stood a great flabby figure, clinging with one hand to a steering lever while the other gripped a lever beside a vertical housing built above the platform. Here was a man of the same breed as the women, but Blaine's keen gaze was on the machine.

Below the housing, underneath the platform, a vertically hung wheel was revolving. He could see only the lower half of it; he saw, too, a whipping chain drive that ran to the rear axle. A tractor, crude, with some motive power unknown, driven by a grotesque imbecile, a half-human giant.

Then Blaine's attention shifted to what came after.

Attached to the clumsy tractor was a string of great plates. Of gray metal, fifty feet in width, three times that in length, they were chained together in a series that came grinding and jangling over the

rise. Twenty of them—more material for that mysterious pavement across the valley.

Portrero was waiting as the machine stopped. The giant, Blaine noted, had moved that lever; at the same time a massive block of gray metal on top of the housing slid backward. It stopped centered over the housing. The machine was still; the big flywheel was no longer turning.

Blaine heard Portrero:

"Over there, you fool!" Then to his men: "Get out there! Keep 'em spread out! Put them alongside the other strings. Don't let them overlap! Don't let them even touch!"

Noisily the machine took up its load. It swung wide, mowing down a fresh swath of rank vegetation. Portrero's motley crew sprang forward and followed.

Portrero waited. Out there the tractor was being unhooked; it started off, swinging in a circle and heading back. Portrero, cursing some awkwardness of his men, ran toward them. Instantly Blaine sprang to his feet.

He moved fast. A moment later he was crashing his body against the crude door of the shelter where Sylvia had vanished. There was no lock; it burst open as he struck it, and he plunged in.

He had expected darkness inside. Instead, that golden outer glow filtered through the metal sheets and lighted the room. He saw a bed, roughly built. A crude metal bench was beside it. Then his eyes found what they were seeking.

In the farthest corner was Sylvia Brewster. Gorsk was near her, his big hands outstretched.

"To hell with Portrero," Gorsk was saying. "I do now as I please!" He turned, cringing, at sound of Blaine's coming.

He must have expected Portrero. His look of fear gave way to surprise. Before he could move, the girl had brushed past him and had flung herself upon the man in the doorway with a glad cry. Her arms went about him. In this moment the quiet poise that had characterized Miss Brewster of New York was gone; her sobbing voice made no effort to hide the feelings that possessed her.

"Oh, my dear—my dear!" she cried brokenly. "It's you, Jimmy! It's really you! You've come to me!"

And Jimmy Blaine, who had longed for the touch of those arms, tore them roughly from about his neck as Gorsk's huge bulk crashed upon him, crushing him to the wall. Sylvia's arms had clung an instant too long; Blaine, breathless under the impact of the man's body, struggled frenziedly.

Clenched into fists, Gorsk's big hands could have dealt the blow of a ten-pound sledge, but instead they felt swiftly for a hold that would pin Blaine's arms at his sides. Blaine knew in the first minute's fighting that he was no match for the other in brute strength.

One arm, for an instant, worked free. He brought his fist up in a close, short hook that jarred the hairy head over upon one shoulder. Another! He felt the man's grip slacken. He tore himself free. Then, in the confines of the four metal walls began a battle where boxing science was pitted against brute strength.

Blaine ducked and weaved. He leaped in for two quick blows into the matted, hairy face, then was away before the big arms could grip him. But his unnatural lightness which gave added spring to his quick dodging took the force from

his solid punches. That first up-percut had had the floor under it for resistance, but there was not a bit of weight behind the straight lefts and rights that he shot in. Then he planted one solid swing on the side of the bearded chin.

It should have brought even the big man down; instead it only threw Blaine off his balance. He staggered back, whirling as his feet struck the metal bench; then he was down. He felt the metal bench under him as Gorsk, with a hoarse shout of triumph, leaped upon him.

He rolled free of the bench—its metal edge would have cut him in two under Gorsk's weight—then the huge hands closed about his throat. He was filled instantly with white-hot agony—blinding, stabbing pain! The very bones seemed crushing under that grip.

Dimly he saw the metal bench swung in air—Sylvia had it. He heard the thud of its flat surface on Gorsk's head. Through the agony that seemed sweeping him to unconsciousness he knew he had one moment's reprieve.

Sylvia had raised the crude weapon again as Blaine dragged himself free and reached for it. Then, though that excruciating pain still blurred all about him, he saw Gorsk crouch and start one last leap across the room.

Outside the door were clattering, jangling sounds. The tractor—their only hope of escape! Blaine, hearing it, sprang to meet Gorsk's rush halfway.

The bench was in his hands; he swung it over and down, while instinctively he turned it edge on. He felt it hit like an ax biting into wood. He himself was lifted bodily from the floor by the force of the blow.

He swayed drunkenly, only half

aware of the huddled thing before him, or of Gorsk's black, matted hair turning muddy-red on a split skull. Pain stabbed at him. Then the loud clangor close outside brought him out of the mists.

He clutched Sylvia in his arms. He was crowding awkwardly through the door with her when he saw the machine. It was passing, the ungainly man-thing on it crouched on the platform, his flabby, pink face turned toward them in consternation and fear. Not far beyond, Portrero and his men were coming. Gorsk's one shout must have reached them.

Sylvia's arms helped Blaine in that last staggering run, but somewhere, in some hidden reservoir of strength, he found energy to lift her and throw her upon the clanking machine. Then he seized the platform's edge and drew himself up. On all fours he scrambled to the housing where a grooved runway made a bed for a sliding metal block.

He tore away the huge hand that was tugging backward on the control lever. He threw his weight against the lever and saw the block slide forward to the limit of its run. Slowly, tantalizingly, the crude machine gained speed.

Shouts, a bedlam of curses, came from behind. He heard Portrero. "Kill him, Oomba, you dog!" The rest was lost in the clatter and clangor from below.

Blaine crouched low to keep his balance. He shouted to Sylvia to lie flat. Then, jerking the steering lever from the unresisting hands of the elephantine Oomba, and with the wheel and the chain drive shrieking protests at the speed, he found himself guiding the careening machine down the rough road that stretched out across a land of rain-

bow hues, where crystal mountains in the distance seemed to be their goal.

VII.

RUSHING PAST them was a weird landscape of glassy black rocks, upheaved, saw-toothed crags, flat stretches of ground splashed with colors—this while the strangest tractor Blaine had ever seen tore crazily along the road and took them at last where no sounds of Portrero's men could be heard. Then Blaine pulled slowly back on the lever until the machine came to a stop. The sliding block was exactly centered on the housing.

Silence descended upon them. Oomba, clinging to the housing, looked at them goggle-eyed, but made no move. Sylvia got to her feet and came to Blaine's side.

She gasped: "I can't—can't quite believe it! You're here—but how did——"

Blaine interrupted, though his first spoken word made him wince and brought his hand to his throat. "Wait!" he begged. "I've got to ask some questions of this machine. I must learn what we've got." He was lifting at a removable side plate on the housing.

What new motor, what intricate arrangement of batteries and coils he expected to see, Blaine could never have told. And instead he found only a wheel—then knew that that was incomplete.

There was the front part, a solid mass of metal. The rear was the same. And that was all! Straight down through the middle of it was nothing at all; even the axle on which it hung was gone. Or nearly gone! He looked closer and saw dimly a luminous, spectral outline of the parts.

He looked at the sliding block.

The shaft of nothingness was directly beneath it. It was as if the block cast a shadow that obliterated all it touched. Gingerly, still watching inside the housing, Blaine moved the lever.

The block slid forward. Its impossible shadow moved with it. Abruptly the middle of the wheel was whole again; the axle was there; the wheel jerked forward and began to turn. But now its forward section was only a phantom thing, nearly invisible. Still the wheel turned. It was big and solid; it jerked at the driving chain and sent the machine jolting ahead—but every atom of it vanished as it moved forward into that zone of emptiness, and reappeared as it swung out below.

Blaine pulled the block back, slid it past the center. Now the rear of the wheel was gone, and the rest intact. And the big flywheel, like something alive, jerked and strained backward. Again he stopped it. Then, as silent and unmoving as any rock about them, Blaine stood and stared at the emptiness through the center of the wheel.

He could not speak. He was seeing something which disproved facts he had thought inviolable. When Oomba reached over and took control, he made no protest. Sylvia, as the machine gained speed, drew Blaine down beside her.

"Jimmy!" she protested. "Listen; we've got to plan! Where are we going? This horrible nightmare place——"

Blaine said: "It isn't magnetic. It isn't electrical. The block does it. The wheel falls away from the block. But it isn't repulsion, either; the moments of inertia are all wrong——"

His mind was reaching out; it took him once more to the roof of the Brewster building. About him

a solid, tangible city was being struck to ghostly nothingness like the phantom thing before his eyes. It was all linked up somehow. He must understand—he must!

Sylvia was beating at him with her bare hands. "Wake up, Jimmy!" she implored. "Look! There are houses ahead! People! What shall we do?"

Blaine said: "The secret's there! It's there, and I'll dig it out!" Then he tore his eyes away from the fascination of the whirling wheel. He came to himself sharply.

Ahead of them were buildings, low structures of stone. Giant figures, like the driver of their machine, moved about or stood watching their approach.

Blaine sprang to his feet and gripped Oomba's arm. How much did the man know? What had Portrero taught him?

"Are they your people?" he demanded. "Are they friendly? Quick! We aren't looking for trouble."

Oomba shook his head stupidly. "Porth," he said; "you go talk Porth. No talk Oomba."

Blaine's glance met Sylvia's. The houses were close.

"Can't turn now," he said. "We'll see it through. We've got to find out what we're up against sooner or later."

The machine jerked noisily to a stop before a cluster of low stone shelters. Beyond, in an open space, were crowding man shapes, misshapen and clumsy, who hammered deafeningly upon more of the gray metal plates. One by one they let their sledges fall. The clanging uproar ceased. Then they came crowding around, and a din of voices took the place of the other sound.

Oomba would have got down from

the machine, but Blaine took him by one big, flabby arm.

"You stay here!" he commanded. "Now listen! Who's your headman—your chief—your boss?"

What words might the man have picked up from Portrero and the others? Blaine pointed at the jabbering throng and tried again. "You no talk. These people no talk. Who talks to Porth?"

In the stolid face came a glimmer of understanding. "Kroa talk Porth talk," said the giant. "Kroa talk your talk."

"Then get him!" Blaine was shouting above the din. "Get Kroa! Send some one for him!"

Oomba nodded. His thick lips formed unintelligible sounds. Below them a big figure detached itself from the crowd and waddled hurriedly away. From hundreds of little stone shelters others were approaching.

Blaine held Sylvia close with one arm while he looked at the weird beings crowding about the machine. There was momentary relief in the realization that the heavy, fat faces seemed to hold nothing of animosity. All of eight feet tall, big and sluggish, the men of this race. Hair, gray-green like the color of weathered copper, hung in straggling locks about their round, absurdly pink faces. Flapping ears projected through it. Blaine felt the girl beside him trembling more from repressed hysteria than from nervous fear.

"Take it easy," Blaine told her. "They don't mean mischief; they're tame enough, I guess. But they won't be any help, either. We've come a hundred miles, but Port's roughnecks will be on our trail—they can come fast up here. I was hoping Oomba's gang might help us, but that's out now."

Women, like those who had emerged from Portrero's huts, had joined the crowd. Ungainly and unlovely, they jostled among the men to get closer and stare with bovine eyes at Sylvia's lovely face. They burst into bellows of scornful laughter that were silenced as another man drew near.

He was taller, broader than the others, and Blaine's confidence vanished as he noted the man's firmer step and his broad face that was deeply scored with lines. His eyes, resting on Blaine for only a moment, were crafty and hard; they looked from long transverse slits in the heavy face. Blaine felt the slim figure of Sylvia Brewster shrink against him at that glance. Then Oomba was speaking.

Oomba's grunts and gurglings might have been ludicrous under other circumstances, but not when they held so plainly a note of fear. Oomba seemed to be giving the newcomer an account of what had transpired. His big body trembled visibly.

"Porth," his contraction of Portrero's name, sounded again and again. Oomba, huddled on the platform of the tractor, was plainly begging at the last, though the one he called Kroa had spoken no word. Kroa's eyes were fixed with relentless coldness on the crouching man before him.

Then Blaine's voice broke in.

"How about my buying a stack of chips," he asked, "and sitting in on the game?"

To be concluded in the next issue.

Dead Men's Blood

IN RUSSIA the blood of suicides, victims of heart disease, and those who have died violent deaths is to be saved for use in cases where blood transfusions are necessary. Doctor Judine, head of a Moscow hospital, has successfully made such transfusions of the blood of the dead. He has discovered a means of keeping blood "alive" in a salt solution in a refrigerator. It can be kept for as long as a month.

What Price Brain Power?

BRAIN weights vary enormously, just as body weights do. The average for men is 1,375 grams. With a smaller body, as a rule there is a smaller brain. The average for women is 1,235 grams.

The largest woman's brain on record was 1,742 grams—she was insane and died of consumption. The second largest weighed 1,580 grams. She also was insane.

The Machine THAT KNEW Too Much

by A. T. Locke



*And from the machine
came the blood-choked
gasps of a dying man.*

I STUMBLED my way up the rotten steps of the old veranda, in the drizzling darkness of the chilly New England night, and after groping blindly around for a while in a vain attempt to find a bell or a knocker, I tapped impatiently on the door.

I waited, listening. Then I knocked again, this time louder and longer.

Had my damp and depressing

walk of two miles along a strange and muddy country road been in vain, and was there nothing else for me to do but to trudge back to Millford to spend the night?

Once more I knocked, this time thundering as loudly as possible.

I heard echoes within—echoes, I knew, of my own making—which quickly ceased and once again left me standing there in silent indecision.

I was almost certain that there was some one in the old mansion for, despite the fact that no lights had been visible in the lower stories, I was positive that I had seen faint lines of illumination etched in the shutters of the garret windows as I had made my way along the weed-infested drive that led, under tall and dripping elms, up to the entrance of the isolated house.

I could have sworn, too, that I had heard voices, faint but nevertheless distinguishable, coming from somewhere inside as I had approached.

So I knocked again.

Without a sound from within, or without the slightest gleam of a warning light, the door suddenly opened and creaked ajar a few inches, and I saw the face of Jonathan Forsythe, grotesquely illuminated by the smoking flame of a kerosene lamp, peering out at me.

"I am Rodney Weatherby," I said impatiently. "If you are Mr. Jonathan Forsythe, I——"

"Yes, yes, Weatherby," he interrupted me, in a high-pitched voice. "I knew that you were coming out to see me to-night, but I did not expect you so soon. Come in, sir, come in."

I seemed to have found him in a state of extreme mental agitation. His hands were shaking, the muscles around his lips were twitching, and he seemed to have little or no control over his voice. And even by the dim light of the lamp, I could see beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead, although the inside of the house was almost as damp and cold as the night outside.

"I thought that you were at home," I told him as I followed after him, "because I was sure that I saw a light upstairs and heard voices."

He paused abruptly and turned and looked at me intently.

"You heard voices?" he asked. Then he nodded his head as if he understood. "Ah, yes," he added, "voices. You heard voices."

Then, turning away from me, he led me into a cavernous room that was lined with shelves which contained row after row of dark-bound tomes.

"So you're Weatherby," said Forsythe, coming to a pause by a dark old table in the middle of the room and holding up the light so that he once more could scrutinize my face. "Hm-m-m. I wonder if you will be up to what I want."

"I can tell you better after I know just what that is, Mr. Forsythe."

He seemed to have regained control of himself, to have subdued the nervous agitation that was shaking him mercilessly when first he had appeared to me at the door.

And, as he peered at me, I got the fleeting suggestion that within his eyes there lurked something of fear. There was a certain somberness about them and, at the same time, a cautiousness, that made them baffling to analyze.

But, queerly enough, I received the impression that here was a man who knew more than any mortal has a right to know, who had seen more than any mortal has a right to see.

My fancy was strengthened by his broad forehead, that was seamed, not with those merely physical lines which indicate no more than defective vision, but with those deep furrows which are the result of convulsive struggles within the mind. They were glyphs which confirmed and explained the conflicting characteristics revealed by Forsythe's eyes.

A strange man, indeed, if the indefinable sensation that had seized me at my first contact with him was any basis for a judgment.

"And now, Weatherby," said Jonathan Forsythe at last, "we'll sit down while you tell me just how much you know about languages and history. And then, if I am satisfied that you are the man I want——"

For an hour or more he cross-examined me. At last, after nodding approvingly, he rose to his feet and picked up the lamp.

"Come with me, Weatherby," he said shortly. "I have a little machine that I wish to show you."

I wondered what sort of a little machine it could be and in what possible connection I, a student of linguistics, could be of use to Jonathan Forsythe in the promotion of whatever device he controlled.

He went ahead of me, carrying the lamp to light our way, and we passed slowly up to the garret.

Once in the attic, with its sloping, rafted ceiling, he placed the lamp on a rough table and then, half disappearing into some gloomy recess of the place, he found and lit another one of the burners.

While he was prying around, I was peering here and there into the shadows in search of the machine of which he had spoken. I saw a waist-high bench that had been constructed along one side of the room, and noticed that a vise was attached to one end of it and that littered over its top there were coils of wire, some old batteries, meters, and other dusty electrical apparatus of various sorts.

So I stood there waiting to find out just why Forsythe had dragged me up to the shadow-haunted room, and as I did I noticed two cats, sleek and fat, that were curled up on the workbench. One of them rose, stretched itself indolently, and regarded me with eyes which gleamed malevolently in the semidarkness.

"Sit down, Mr. Weatherby," Jona-

than Forsythe urged me in a voice which seemed to be vibrant with excitement. "You are about to experience a demonstration of something very wonderful, something very wonderful indeed."

I sat down on the edge of a rickety chair and watched him as he went to a dark wooden cabinet that stood against the wall not far from me.

On the front of it I could distinguish several dials, each of them some five inches in diameter, and I could see, even in the dim light, that their edges were minutely graduated by fine lines. A half dozen smaller dials were ranged above the larger ones.

Protruding from the right side of the device was a bewildering array of levers. My first survey of the apparatus, however, failed to give me any clue to its purpose or possibilities. It did occur to me, as a matter of fact, that the cabinet bore some resemblance to a radio.

I WATCHED Forsythe curiously as, entirely absorbed in his task, he carefully adjusted some of the levers on the side of the device. Then he turned two of the smaller dials, handling them with almost reverential caution, and I heard, issuing from the cabinet, a faint murmuring that suddenly was punctuated by a fierce staccato barking. Then I found myself listening to a jumble of snarling and growling that made my scalp tingle and that sent strange chills racing up and down my spine.

A sudden vicious hissing behind me caused me to turn abruptly, and I saw that both of the cats on the workbench were standing with their backs arched in terror and defiance, their eyes blazing in the semidarkness.

"Instinct is a strange thing,

Weatherby," he said in his queer voice. "The brain of the cat still recognizes the voices of its enemies of hundreds of thousands of years ago. And perhaps even you felt——"

"Hundreds of thousands of years ago?" I interrupted incredulously.

"Those are sounds from Tertiary times, I believe," he replied simply, peering at me with sharp eyes as if trying to determine my exact reaction to his amazing statement. "After all, Weatherby, sound is vibration, and vibrations, once set in motion, never die."

But even then the stupendous nature of the device that was in the possession of Forsythe did not dawn upon me.

I heard sounds that no one living for ages had heard; I heard voices of those who had been dust for centuries.

I heard ancient Greeks discussing politics in the Forum, and Romans talking of war outside of a temple. Sounds and voices came to me, out of that miraculous cabinet, from all ages and from all parts of the world, and there must have been awe in my eyes as I looked at old Forsythe when we stood together again in his musty old library.

Then we sat down and he told me what was in his mind and what he wanted me to do.

He was, it seems, in danger of running short of money, and he wished to locate and retrieve one or more of the lost treasures of the world.

We were to work together, with the aid of the machine, and locate riches, and I was to take upon myself the task of unearthing and recovering them.

"But that seems rather a strange way to get money, Mr. Forsythe," I suggested. "By patenting your invention, you——"

He leaped to his feet and stood

looking down at me with an expression in which fright and fury seemed to be mingled together.

"That's what I was afraid of!" he almost screamed. "That machine is mine—mine—and no one must ever know of it!"

His face was livid with rage and for a moment I thought that he was going to clutch at my throat with his talonlike fingers.

"You promised me, Weatherby," he whispered huskily, his entire manner suddenly changing, "that you would keep my secret!" And then a note of pleading crept into his voice. "Can't I trust you, Weatherby; can't I trust you?"

His hands fell to his side, his fingers twitching, and looked at me with a frightened, supplicating face.

"Of course you can trust me, Mr. Forsythe," I told him. "I only made a suggestion, but if you don't——"

"No!" he exclaimed, "No! Only you and I, Weatherby, are to know about my machine. No one else ever must hear of it. And now," he added, "if you will wait here a moment, I will get your money and give you your first week's pay."

He shuffled out into the darkness of the hallway and disappeared, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Three days before, toward the end of commencement week, I had been a college graduate with no particular plans in mind. Then, wandering aimlessly over the campus, I had met a friend who was in the placement bureau.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, Rod," he had told me. "There is a hundred-dollar-a-week job on tap for a man who has specialized in languages and history and who has a sound physique and is willing to travel. If you are interested——"

That was what had brought me to Jonathan Forsythe's strange old

mansion into which, at his will, all the voices of the past could whisper.

I heard his feet coming down the long hallway. I rose to my feet as he came toward me.

"Here," he said, extending a bony hand, "are twenty golden guineas which the bank in Millford will change into United States currency for you."

He picked up the lamp and I followed him as he shuffled slowly out of the room and up the stairs to the second floor.

There he led me to a large front room, barren and drab, furnished only with a cot, an old-fashioned bureau, and a couple of chairs.

"Good-night, Weatherby," he said, and paused hesitantly. "Remember," he added, a flicker of fear showing momentarily in his eyes, "that no one but you and I must ever know of my machine."

Then he turned abruptly and went out, closing the creaking door after him.

I sat down and lit a cigarette, glancing at the little heap of gleaming coins which I had scattered on the top of the bureau.

England, I happened to know, had not minted golden guineas within Forsythe's span of life, and as I regarded them curiously, they contributed to the feeling of unreality that had taken possession of me.

Had a voice from that mysterious machine in the gloomy garret above me come out of the past to Jonathan Forsythe and told him just where to lay his hands on a hoard of the heavy yellow disks?

I disrobed and lay down on the uncomfortable cot, scarcely knowing whether I was awake or whether I was in the midst of some weird dream. Once during the night, I believe, I awoke and heard the faint echoes of voices in the distance.

I paid but little heed to them, however, because I had been dreaming of that uncanny machine, and my moment of waking merged insensibly with the sensations which I was experiencing in my slumber.

I WAS UP early the next morning and, guided by the odor of frying bacon, I made my way down to the kitchen, where I found Forsythe scrambling together a breakfast.

He turned suddenly, a startled expression on his face.

"You frightened me, Weatherby!" he gasped. And then he became a little calmer. "When a man has been alone for sixteen years—" He shook his head.

He served up the breakfast, bacon and eggs, steaming hot coffee and toasted bread.

"I've been wondering about those golden guineas you gave me last night," I confessed as we sat there eating. "Did you find those by means of your machine?"

He cast a suspicious glance at me, and there was a gleam of annoyance in his eyes.

"Oh, I got those many years ago," he replied evasively. "But what are a few guineas? Nothing compared to the forgotten treasures which are buried in many parts of the world. England has been a comparatively poor country," he continued, "and it holds so little of interest to me that I seldom ever tune in on it. It is in other lands, far from there, that our interest lies, Weatherby."

"Whatever you say, Mr. Forsythe," I agreed.

I wondered at the time, though, why he was apparently averse to questing into the past history of the British Isles. It would be there, if anywhere, that the language he would hear would be intelligible to him.

For Jonathan Forsythe, I soon learned, had no gift for linguistics, and beyond a smattering of the Romance languages he understood only his native tongue.

"Assuming that we do manage to learn the location of one of these treasures of which you speak," I asked him, "how will you arrange to recover it?"

"That will be your task, Weatherby," he told me. "I will supply the necessary money, of which I still have a sufficiency at my command."

We made our way to the garret after finishing breakfast, and there the machine stood, immobile and harmless in appearance, that strange cabinet through which the secrets of all times and all men might be heard.

"I have an idea," said Forsythe, "that it might be well to get Granada in Spain in the fifteenth century—say about 1489. Do you understand archaic Arabian and Spanish, Weatherby?"

"I have some knowledge of them," I told him, "and I am thoroughly familiar with both of the modern languages. I don't believe that I will have much difficulty in understanding the old forms after I listen to them for a while."

So all of that day I heard voices which came out of old Spain. As the hours passed by, they became more and more intelligible to me.

I heard artisans talking while they worked, and I heard lovers whispering at their trysts.

We ranged back and forth over a few years, centered for the most part on the site of Granada, but out of all the multitude of voices which came to us out of the past, none of them spoke of treasure.

"It may take days, or even weeks," said Jonathan Forsythe, "before we happen upon the clue that we need.

But it is well known to history that the Moors, when they finally were driven from Spain, concealed fabulous riches which they could not take with them. So we can afford to be patient, young man."

I suggested an obvious idea at dinner that night to the old man.

"Why go into the past to seek information of value?" I asked him. "You can pick up the voices of all the living as well as those of the dead. Why not—"

"No, no, Weatherby!" he exclaimed harshly. "I never will use my machine in that way. I swore an oath long ago that I never would use it to betray the living in any way, and that oath I intend to keep."

During the remainder of the meal, Jonathan Forsythe was inclined to be silent and I felt that this was because he was weary after the incessant labor of the day. When the meal was ended, he regarded me doubtfully two or three times, as if he were on the point of asking me a question.

"I wonder," he finally remarked, "if you would mind running into the village to-night. I am expecting a letter, and the grocer's boy won't be out here again until the day after tomorrow."

"I will be glad to go," I told him. "It will be a change after being in all day."

He seemed, for some reason, to be vastly relieved at my willingness to make the trip for him, and I wondered from where and from whom he expected a letter.

I left the house and ambled slowly on to Millford, a town of some eight or nine hundred inhabitants.

The post office was an adjunct of an old-fashioned drug store. "Mail for Jonathan Forsythe?" croaked the white-haired, decidedly deaf old man behind the counter after I had

repeated my question three or four times. "Be you th' young feller that's stoppin' up to Forsythe's?"

"Yes," I replied.

"What be ye doin' up thar?" he asked me curiously.

"Granddad!" I heard a soft voice reproach the old fellow, and a girl came from somewhere out of the shadows in the back of the store and joined him behind the counter.

The old man blinked uneasily. For a moment he wore the rather comical expression of a child who has been surprised while indulging in some forbidden naughtiness.

"Granddad is a very old man," the bright-haired girl almost whispered to me, "and he is rather inclined to be interested in the affairs of other people. You asked if there is any mail for Jonathan Forsythe?" she questioned. "There is nothing to-day. He very seldom receives any mail."

"I can imagine that," I replied, just for the sake of speaking with the pretty girl. "Mr. Forsythe seems to be pretty much of a recluse."

"I have lived in Millford all my life," she told me, "and I haven't even seen him once."

"From what I know of him already," I explained, "I don't believe that he is much of a social butterfly."

"It will be rather lonesome for you out there with him, won't it? And from what people say, I should think that it would be rather dangerous."

"Dangerous?" I echoed. "Not at all. Mr. Forsythe is a perfectly rational old man despite any stories which may have been circulated about him. And as for being lonesome—well, I don't believe that he will have any objection to my coming to Millford in the evening once in a while."

She blushed a trifle and smiled at

me, and I knew that she had understood the implication in my words.

I left her and walked back to Forsythe's, where I found the old man waiting up for me in the library.

He appeared to be in a highly nervous state. He had all the symptoms of one who had just passed through some horrifying, soul-searing ordeal. Why? Why?

"There was no mail for me?" he asked huskily.

"No, Mr. Forsythe," I told him. "I enjoyed the walk, though, and Millford seems to be a pleasant little town."

A faint smile relieved his tense expression.

"Any town is a pleasant town to a young man," he asserted, "when he finds a pretty girl in it."

"How did you know that——" Then I paused and smiled myself. I realized that Jonathan Forsythe very probably had listened to the talk I had had with the girl of the Millford drug store. "You heard me talking with her," I accused him.

"Of course, of course," he admitted. "Didn't it occur to you that I might be interested in your opinion of me?"

"I didn't give it a thought," I replied, "but I'll have to bear it in mind after this."

"If you speak of me as fairly as you spoke to-night," he told me, "I will be very grateful to you."

Tired after the work of the day and my long walk of the evening, I soon went up to my room and went to bed. The next morning I was up early, and again we spent the entire day listening to voices which came from Granada during the era that preceded the expulsion of the Moors.

Many voices, speaking of many things, came clearly down to us through all the centuries, but none

of them spoke of that which we were seeking to learn of. I was so fascinated by the strange lore that I was hearing that, after dinner, I asked Forsythe if we could not continue our work during the evening.

He agreed, somewhat wearily I thought, and with the old man close by my side, I spent a marvelous evening in that gloomy garret.

"If you are tired," I suggested when midnight was long past, "just show me how to turn the machine off and I will listen here alone."

He regarded me sharply, with eyes that were shrewd, suspicious and fearful, and shook his head decisively.

"No one but myself must ever operate my machine," he rasped. "We have heard enough for to-day, anyway."

THE NEXT evening, after a day spent in the garret, I again went to Millford at his request, and this time I lingered for a while with the girl of the drug store. Her name, I learned, was Ruth Corbin, and when I asked her, she agreed to go to the pictures with me. When I took her home I sat with her for a while on the clematis-clad porch of the house which she occupied with her grandfather.

It was not particularly agreeable to woo a girl when I knew that some one else was hearing every term of endearment that passed between us. And my aggravation was increased by the fact that I could not be completely frank with Ruth.

The days slipped into weeks, and the intricate pattern of the history of the last days of the Moorish domain in Spain slowly took shape. Our quest resembled the assembling of a jig-saw puzzle in which echoes of whispered gossip, strange dialogues from lips long dead, bewil-

dering bits of conversation formed the elements of the picture that was the object of our pursuit.

And as time went by, I became more and more oppressed with the consciousness that in the house of Forsythe there was some vague and somber mystery of which I was entirely unaware. The longer I remained there, the stronger I was possessed by a feeling of uneasiness, a sensation that merged at moments into positive dread. I tried at first to analyze it, to seek a rational explanation for the unrest and foreboding that I felt, and for a while I was inclined to attribute it to the natural awe that a person might well experience in the presence of Forsythe's astounding machine.

But it was not that almighty ear that instilled into me that uneasy feeling. I was forced at last to the conclusion that the secret of the sinister atmosphere in the old mansion was allied in some way to Forsythe, and to Forsythe alone.

He was unmistakably a haunted man, and it was the specter that shadowed him that cast its direful shadow over the old place.

Something, or perhaps some one, was in that house that made Forsythe, at times, acutely impatient of my presence there. His suggestions that I spend the evening in town were made to me on occasions in almost the nature of commands, and the only conclusion that I could draw from this evident desire on his part to rid himself of my company was that for some overpowering reason he felt it imperative to be alone. And upon my return late at night, I would find him in a mental condition that seemed to border close on hysteria.

I became half aware, too, that distant voices in the night frequently disturbed my sleep and left me rest-

less and unrefreshed upon awakening in the morning.

We were coming closer and closer to the clue we were seeking. The secret of the long-lost treasure of Granada almost was in our grasp, and we had been so busy that for two evenings I had not gone into Millford.

"You will go to town to-night, won't you?" Jonathan Forsythe asked me that evening after dinner.

There was almost a feverish anxiety in his voice, and the question was reflected in the pleading in his eyes.

"I am very tired," I told him irritably, "and I was figuring on going to bed early to-night."

An angry expression suffused his countenance and there was a sharp note of irritation in his voice when he spoke to me.

"Some one will run away with your sweetheart if you don't pay more attention to her," he said. "And I am still expecting a letter, and maybe it is waiting at the post office for me now."

"Well, if you insist on it, I will take a walk into Millford," I replied.

IT WAS almost dark when I started for town, and the night being uncomfortably cold, the prospect before me was not a comfortable one.

A faint glow of light became visible through the broken shutters of the blinds in the garret windows as I approached, and I knew that old Forsythe had gone upstairs as soon as he had locked the door behind me.

I wondered what had impelled him to rid himself of me so that he might return so quickly to that all-hearing machine, and I determined then and there to find out.

I had no key to the house, and Forsythe always kept the front door locked and bolted. But one of my

windows was open, and I knew that, under the cover of darkness, it would be comparatively easy to gain access to my room by climbing one of the rotting pillars of the veranda. This I did, after making a careful approach to the place, and finally I found myself in the drab chamber in which I had been sleeping.

I waited there for a moment, listening, and I was certain that I heard the sound of voices.

Then, cautiously, I opened my door. The voices became more audible; I knew they were coming from the garret, and I knew, further, that one of them was the voice of Jonathan Forsythe.

I slipped silently out into the hallway and stole cautiously through the darkness until I reached the foot of the attic stairs and carefully opened the door that gave access to them.

I could hear clearly now, and it was at once apparent that Forsythe was having a bitter argument with some one who was with him up above. That, then, was the reason why he was so anxious to rid himself of me at frequent intervals.

"I have trusted you too much, John Forester," I heard a voice say bitterly and reproachfully, "and I realize it now! I thought that you were my friend, but now I know that you have been scheming to betray me!"

John Forester? Was there a third man up there, then?

But I heard the high-pitched, characteristic voice of Forsythe shrill out in a reply.

"That's a lie—a damn lie!" he exclaimed.

"No, Forester, it is not a lie," came the low, threatening voice, "and we are going to have a reckoning right now!"

"A reckoning?" sneered Forsythe.

"Yes," asserted the other voice, "a

reckoning! You planned to steal my great machine, to make away with my golden guineas. And now——"

"And now," came the strident voice of Forsythe, "I am going to kill you! This house is far away from town, and no one will know. And then, after you are dead, I will go away and——"

"John!" I heard the other plead fearfully. "No! No!"

The sound of three sharp shots echoed through the old garret. Throwing all caution aside, I pulled the door open and leaped up the stairs.

I found Forsythe there alone, sitting hunched up in a chair, staring at me with horror-stricken eyes.

And from that machine there came a gurgle of inarticulate sounds, the gaspings of a blood-choked, dying man.

THEN FORSYTHE sprang to his feet, his eyes wild with terror and desperation.

"You heard?" he rasped. "You heard?"

"Yes, Mr. Forsythe," I told him, "and I rushed up here because I thought that you were in trouble—I thought some one else was here."

He stood there staring at me strangely. Suddenly a realization of what it all meant swept over me, and, as his guilt was revealed, I made a gesture of involuntary loathing.

Out of his drawn face he looked at me with haggard and haunted eyes.

"So at last the thing that I have feared for years has happened," he said slowly and brokenly. "My secret no longer is my own."

For a moment he paused, and then he broke into a breathless, almost incoherent confession.

"And I believe that I am glad," he continued, "glad that I no longer

am alone with my accusing conscience. Yes, I killed Jarard Mason—in England—many years ago. He was my friend. He trusted me—but I killed him because I wanted his golden guineas, and I wanted his machine, I wanted to reap the rewards of his genius. And then—after I had killed him—I knew that I had murdered in vain.

"The very existence of that machine was a menace to my own safety, because among all the secrets that it held there was that one that threatened damnation to me. I never had thought of that, Weatherby, until after I had shot him, long ago.

"I managed to escape from England. I made my way here—and here I have lived alone—and not alone. Some unknown power was forever compelling me to sit by that machine and listen to the hideous echoes of my crime. It was driving me mad, Weatherby, driving me mad, and—I'm glad that at last it is all over!"

An understanding of the long and bitter ordeal through which Jonathan Forsythe had passed left me with a sense of pity for him after my first feeling of revulsion had vanished.

"What has been done, Forsythe, has been done," I told him. "You need not fear that I——"

"What is done is never done," he interrupted me harshly. "Deeds, words and even thoughts—all are indelibly recorded somewhere among the great and mysterious forces of the universe, and some day the record will be revealed to all who care to read."

He stared at me with somber, brooding eyes for a moment.

"You have been kind to me, Weatherby," he then said more calmly, "and there is one more favor I would request of you. Go into

Millford and notify the police that I am wanted for murder in England and that I am waiting here to be taken into custody. Only by making full atonement can I ever find the peace I so long have craved."

I left him slumped over in his chair, sitting close to that monstrous machine. As I walked through the dark hallways and then down the dark and weed-tangled driveway to the road, I thought of what a great and terrible thing it was—that device that had an almost godlike omnipotence in its one sense of hearing.

A blinding flash of light suddenly dazzled my eyes and was followed by a detonation that resembled the crash of near-by thunder.

Half stunned, I reeled around. By the light of the red glare that hovered over the place, I saw that the upper part of Forsythe's old mansion was a shambles of torn and tangled timbers.

Smoke was billowing upward through the feverish light and tongues of flame were licking the darkness of the night above. I raced breathlessly back to the house, but I knew before I was close to it that the place was doomed.

Jonathan Forsythe, undoubtedly long prepared for what had transpired, had erased with flame the record of his past perfidy, and at the same time had sought in death refuge from the stark specter of his conscience.

I wondered how I ever could explain to the authorities at Millford just what had happened.

It all was so utterly incredible that my story might be received with suspicion and distrust that would recoil on me and cause me serious difficulties.

On my way to town, after there was little left of the old house but a shapeless heap of glowing, smoking embers, I met people attracted by the crash of the explosion and by the red tinge in the sky. When they crowded around me, among them Ruth with a white and frightened face, seeking to find out what had happened, my answer came to me like an inspiration.

"Forsythe for years has been working on a formula for a high explosive," I explained, "and, while I was downstairs, something must have gone wrong."

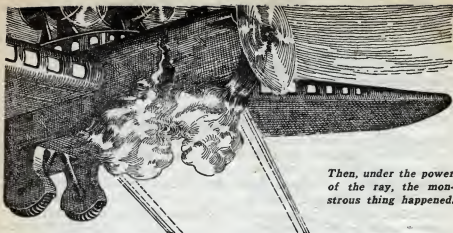
I let Ruth believe that story at that time, but after we were married I told her the truth.

She pretended to accept it, but I am sure that she thought that, for some reason or other, I was doing a little harmless romancing. But what has been done once will be done again, and most surely the time will come when the secret of that omnipotent ear will be rediscovered.

Even now, perhaps, somewhere in the world, there is a Thing that is listening, listening, listening.

Agitation!

IN 1857 cartridges greased with a mixture of cow fat and hog lard were issued to the native Indian troops. This was contrary to the religion of both the Hindu and Mohammedan Sepoys. Agitators played upon the fact that it was an attempt to force Christianity upon them—and the Sepoy mutiny of 1857 was the direct result.



*Then, under the power
of the ray, the mon-
strous thing happened.*

THE SHARP rasp of a buzzer cut through the twilight quiet of Carson Dane's office in the state department building. On the far wall, where his personal radiophone switchboard hung, a red light glowed for a moment. The chief of aerial detectives was on his feet and had crossed the wide room before the buzzer had ceased clicking. He snapped in a jack.

"Dane speaking," he said. "What is it?"

A wavering voice came faintly to his straining ears. He stood like a statue, one hand pressing the receiver to his head, the other adjusting a condenser. Taut lines appeared in his face and hardened around the grim mouth; his whole body grew rigid. There was something wrong—something terribly wrong. In that faint voice calling to him from half across the world there sounded a dreadful note. It was tremulous with exhaustion and fear.

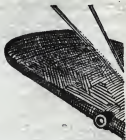
"K-7—K-7—K-7!" it called again and again. "Dane—Dane—for God's sake!"

"Yes, K-7!" Dane called back. "What is it?"

There came a sob of relief and then a torrent of half-articulate speech.

"Get Presnick! Presnick! Quick, Dane; lock him up before it's too late! They're working through him. I've seen the machine. It's like a dream of hell! I tried to destroy it, but they caught me. They're coming for me now. Arrest Presnick, quick!"

There sounded a fusillade of shots and the clatter of furious struggle;



The Invading Blood Stream

by PAUL STARR

A Power-crazed Scientist Brings Adventure to a Complacent World

a cry of agony—and the instrument was silent. The man at the other end of that invisible connection was dead.

There was silence in the office. The secret agent slowly lowered the instrument. Only the fire that blazed deep in his eyes revealed the tumult that surged within him. His ears rang with the sound of those distant shots—the death knell of a courageous servant of these United States. That martyr had been more than just a valuable employee of the tremendous department of which Carson Dane was the chief—he had been a loyal and loved friend as well. The Central European Confederacy had scored one more point in the gigantic undercover battle which had been growing fiercer and fiercer since the days of the war debt repudiation by Europe and America's reply of a closed frontier. One step closer to victory!

Pitting his brilliant wit and superb capacity for organization against Old World diplomacy and intrigue, Carson Dane had so far held a hostile world to a draw. But now a movement against the United States was stirring all along the line. Rumors of an attempt at invasion, fantastic fragments of an incredible plan, had been filtering to Washington through her far-flung line of secret agents. Four of her sons had died in the line of duty in the past

four weeks—had died deaths mysterious, terrible, but not in vain.

With a quick, decisive gesture, Dane replaced the receiver on its hook and strode to his desk. From the top drawer he drew a flat automatic in its shoulder holster, slipped it on and left the room. A few moments later he was in the private office of the secretary for foreign affairs and unfolding to that anxious cabinet official the events of the past five minutes.

"And so you see, sir," he concluded, "it is necessary—vital—that I leave for Europe to-night. That message was sent from Khaskoi in what used to be Bulgaria. They are holding the annual maneuvers of the Confederacy's army there, five hundred thousand of wonderfully drilled and equipped shock troops. If that army could ever be landed here—"

"But it can't be, Dane," the secretary cut in. "There's an ocean between us, don't forget that. The C. E. C. has a second-rate navy. How could they be transported here? Our fleets are supreme on the seas and in the air. That's why we abandoned our army in 1936. A peaceful nation that stands first on the water and in the skies doesn't need one."

Carson Dane shook his head slowly. "Until now we have been safe. But don't forget, sir, that sci-

ence marches ever forward. In the hands of a genius, she can be a deadly tool."

"You refer to Doctor Hugo Presnick?"

"Exactly. If I wanted to be melodramatic, I should call him the arch-enemy of the United States. He was born a Rumanian, and he was born with a lust for world power. The C. E. C. has no more brilliant servant in its ranks. And what makes him doubly dangerous to us is his eminence in the scientific world. By virtue of it, he is virtually untouchable unless we possess overwhelming proof against him."

"He lectured at the Carnegie Institution last month, I hear."

"I was there," Dane answered grimly. His face grew somber. "It was fantastic. He performed miracles. By means of Heuffler's 'dark light' and a strong magnetic field, he gave a demonstration of how he could vary the orbital motion of electrons within the atom. When he slows them down, he condenses the gross material and there is a consequent shrinkage in volume. Why, he took a piece of the hardest vanadium steel—a cubic meter of the stuff—and reduced it to the size of a pinhead, in full view of the audience. He took a living guinea pig and——"

Dane's voice trailed off; he stood a moment in profound thought, then turned quickly to the door.

"I'll ask you, sir, to requisition me a navy stratosphere fighter. I'll take off at midnight and land in Vienna in four or five hours. From there I'll proceed into the C. E. C. as best I can. But before I go, I'm going to have a look around Doctor Presnick's laboratory."

"Watch out, Dane," his superior warned him. "Remember that any overt act against Doctor Presnick

would have extremely serious consequences. Tension is at the breaking point now and we can't afford a rupture over nothing!"

"When the rupture comes, sir," the secret agent earnestly assured him, "it won't be over *nothing*."

AN HOUR later, Dane stopped his car on the extreme outskirts of the city. A mean and sinister little street lay before him. He descended, locked the car, and proceeded on foot at a swift pace, keeping all the while in the deep shadow that lay beside a high brick wall. At the far end of the block the wall curved sharply away and disclosed a sordid vista of slag heaps, freight yards, and abandoned factories.

Inside the long brick wall lay a huge tumble-down building, apparently a former malt house. And toward it Dane proceeded swiftly and silently through the thick, smoky gloom of approaching night.

There came to his ears the sound of voices talking in muffled undertones. His straining eyes made out the shape of two cars parked against the curb. A cautious reconnaissance resolved them into the car belonging to the ambassador of the Confederacy and the personal limousine of Doctor Hugo Presnick. The two chauffeurs had gathered in the front seat of the embassy car and were chatting together while their masters went about other business somewhere inside the huge, sinister building.

Carson Dane retreated a few yards and then went over the brick wall with the agility of a prowling panther. The shriek and rattle of a switching freight drowned the crunch of gravel beneath his feet as he slipped quickly into the shadow of the building. A few minutes work with a knife blade disposed of

the lock on a ground-floor window. He raised the sash with care and took a final look about him.

He was about to enter the innermost sanctum of a very dangerous man—Doctor Hugo Presnick, bio-physicist of world fame, counselor to the embassy of the Confederacy—plotter extraordinary against the United States of America. Carson Dane was never the man to undervalue his antagonist; but the word 'fear' found no place in the dictionary of his existence. He was prepared to play his iron nerve, years of experience, and single-hearted devotion against the colossal brain and fanatic hatred of this sinister genius.

Sowly and soundlessly he drew his lithe body up over the sill and stepped into the inky darkness beyond. A minute later and he had located the door of the storeroom which he had entered; had opened it slowly and moved out into the hall beyond.

At the end of the hall lay the door opening into the laboratories. He approached it soundlessly and then crouched there with his eye to the keyhole.

The laboratory into which Dane gazed was an enormous place lit by several powerful hanging lights with green shades which threw a good illumination directly beneath them, but left the outer edges of the hall in comparative obscurity. In this semidarkness could be distinguished a group of huge induction coils, electromagnets, condensers, and a gigantic electrostatic machine. Against the far wall was a complete chemist's paradise with racks of test tubes, bottles of reagents and several beautiful balances in glass cases. But what riveted the attention of the unseen watcher was the scene which was taking place in the imme-

diate foreground directly beneath his eyes.

The short, powerful figure of Doctor Presnick, with its huge bowed shoulders, long arms, and thick-lensed spectacles, was bending over a tray of surgeon's knives. On a stool near by sat the ambassador of the Confederacy, thin, waspish, subtle.

The third member of the group was lying in a surgeon's chair, tilted back almost to the horizontal. His brawny arms and chest gleamed in the glare of the drop light above. The rest of his body was covered by a sheet. His dull peasant face was turned fixedly on the lamp above him, and it was immediately apparent to Dane, peering through the aperture in the door, that he was in a semicomatose condition induced either by a powerful drug or by some alteration in his glandular functions.

The scientist and the diplomat paid no attention to him as they chatted.

"Just what, then, are you proposing for this evening, Hugo?" the diplomat asked in the Magyar tongue.

"To-night," replied the scientist, "there will be a little test to see how my culture is holding up. This peasant was 'implanted' nearly two months ago. I had previously removed a part of the pituitary body to slow down his vital processes. Next, I injected a small palustrine organism into his lymphatic system. The effect has been to render him completely docile, insensible to pain and acutely reactive to the ordinary hypnotic drugs. We performed our infiltration, and this man, whose name I cannot even remember, had the supreme honor of becoming Carrier No. 1. A fortnight ago he was smuggled into the United States, and to-night I shall make a prelimi-

nary test to see how my culture is standing up under its host's change of air and diet."

"And what will you do if you find that it has? What provision have you made for keeping——"

"Ah, not so fast, my dear friend," the scientist cut in. "We shall not go that far to-night. A partial recall from inanition will suffice. You shall see."

He finished sterilizing a hypodermic needle and plunged it into the arm of the giant in the operating chair. In a moment the dull eyes had closed completely. The scientist pulled up the lids and looked at the pupils.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "When the moment comes, I shall sacrifice you with quite genuine regret, No. 1. You have been a most exemplary subject. A guinea pig could not have been better!"

He picked up a surgeon's scalpel and deftly slit the patient's left forearm. Dane pressed desperately against the door to observe the details of the astonishing scene.

In a few moments the scientist had succeeded in inserting a small metal-tipped rubber tube into one of the patient's arteries, passing the blood stream thence into a small chamber between two large electrodes and then leading the stream back into the body via another tube to a vein.

He threw a switch and the deep hum of an induction coil broke through the quiet of the laboratory. With his eye to a hole in a small chamber situated between the electrodes, the scientist began to count aloud. When he had reached twenty-five, he abruptly switched off the current, ligatured the artery, and in a few minutes more had sewed up the arm.

"Now, my friend," he said, "we shall see."

Sweat glistened on his forehead; his eyes gleamed as he made a final adjustment of his apparatus. He threw in another switch, and the charging belt of the condensers began to move. As the charges began to pile up on the electrodes, the air of the laboratory grew frightfully oppressive. Dane could see the mounting tension begin to affect both men.

Suddenly a blue ribbon of fire darted across the gap, and the air was filled with the bitter pungency of ozone. Discharge after discharge followed, until the sharp crackling became almost continuous.

"Watch now!" Doctor Presnick howled above the din. "I am about to increase the electron orbits in the fluid I extracted from the blood stream! I shall project the effect on the screen yonder."

There flashed out a dazzling beam of light, and Dane saw an image appear on the white wall opposite. At first he could see only tiny specks which moved about at random. These grew rapidly in size, the field narrowed and grew lighter, and presently there appeared what the secret agent at first guessed to be a corpuscle swimming across the line of vision.

But another moment convinced him that he had been wrong. The object grew rapidly until it occupied the entire field of the projection apparatus. It had now become metallic in luster.

A moment later there took place a further change, this time in shape. The object began to resemble what Dane could only liken to a mummy case in some museum. The shining shell was no longer smooth. Highlights and shadows appeared here and there; small indentations check-

ered its surface. Above the snarl of the flaming discharges came the cry of the scientist.

"You will see movement in a moment! There! *It lives*—and I am triumphant—triumphant!"

Within that metallic shell *something* was struggling to free itself! Dane felt the sweat creep down his face, felt the bitter taste of it in his mouth. What was it? What writhed and twisted there so desperately, prisoned within a molecule of human blood?

He felt a nameless horror grip him. Whatever the sinister object might be, he had witnessed this man's magic genius lift it from a microscopic bit of matter whirling in a peasant's blood stream, to a fantastic monster a million times as large!

A hoarse shriek of agony rocked the laboratory. The ambassador sprang from his stool.

"My God!" he cried. "Look!"

Presnick snapped off the light and whirled about.

The huge peasant, recovering from the effects of the numbing drug, had risen unobserved from the table and walked over to the chair across which his clothes were lying. He stood now between two of the big electromagnets, swaying to and fro as if battling an invisible gale, and his face was contorted by a spasm of the most terrible agony. The great round body of the man had turned a dull red and was stretching to a bursting tautness. Another awful shriek shook the beholders.

A trickle of blood had appeared squarely in the center of the man's chest. The next moment a hundred streams of the vital fluid burst from every part of the writhing body, and the wretch sank to the floor.

With a howl of fury, Doctor Pres-

nick flung himself upon the big wall switch, and the hum of the magnets ceased as the energizing force was cut off. The scientist was beside himself with rage.

"Fool! Blockhead!" he screamed at the unhappy man. "Did I not tell you never to go near the magnets? Why have you done this, swine? Now, many perish because of the doltishness of one!"

But the great peasant had no answer to give him. He lay on his back in an ever-widening pool of blood, his dull eyes glazed in death as they stared reproachfully at the man whose tool he had been. There came a twitch or two, and he was dead.

The scientist grew calmer. He mopped his streaming face and tugged at his wilted collar.

"Well," he said at last with brutal cynicism, "at any rate he has demonstrated that my culture is present in quantity. But it is a costly way to find it out. There must be no more blunders."

"What shall we do? Can you not save his blood?" the ambassador asked in a strangled voice. Horror had momentarily conquered the suave diplomat.

Presnick made a gesture of negation. "Useless. The nitrogen of the air has already been fatal to the ions. Call in the chauffeurs; we must get rid of this nuisance on the floor!"

So absorbed had Carson Dane been in the terrible drama that the ambassador was almost at the door before he realized the danger of discovery. His muscles sprang to life; he slipped across the hall just as the door was opening and was into the dark storeroom with half a second to spare. The moment that the for-eigner's steps had passed his hiding place, the detective was out of the

window again and had closed it softly behind him.

Another minute, and he had reached the corner and his car. His get-away had been perfect. Of the four men who now stood viewing the ghastly sight in the laboratory floor, not one suspected that there had been an unbidden witness to the terrible events of the evening.

For a short moment the detective debated summoning the police and arresting Doctor Presnick on the charge of murder. This was what K-7 had urged, certainly. But almost at once he put the thought behind him. There were dark secrets in far lands still to solve. The blood of four faithful friends cried out to him for vengeance. He had a positive feeling that it was in Khaskoi, far away, that the answer to the riddle lay. Doctor Presnick could wait a little longer.

It was ten minute before midnight when Dane drove out on to the Central Flying Field and drew up beside his waiting plane. Close alongside the giant commercial air liner plying the Washington-Rome-Vienna route was taking on its passengers. It bulked like a colossus beside the tiny navy stratosphere ship which Dane was going to fly.

The detective was gazing at it when a car raced up. Two men descended, Presnick and the ambassador. Invisible in the cabin of his own ship, Dane watched them tensely.

They stood for a moment in deep conversation, a little apart from the swirl of last-minute arrivals. Then the scientist entered the plane; the diplomat reseated himself in the automobile and was borne away. Whistles sounded; the sharp roar of motors blasted the soft night, and the great ship rumbled forward. She would land in Europe the next day.

Carson Dane's face was set in hard fighting lines as he adjusted his oxygen tubes for the cold, lofty reaches of the upper sky. He and Doctor Presnick were journeying toward the same destination—of this he had no doubt.

He got his "all clear" signal and took off, upward and eastward into the silent night.

Three days later, again in the dead of night, he stepped out of the cockpit of a government plane into the icy air three miles above the Khaskoi tableland. A parachute brought him safely to the ground, and the rising sun disclosed only a solitary man trudging along the dusty country road. The secret agent Carson Dane had vanished, his identity as carefully buried as the now useless parachute. In his place remained only this inoffensive grain salesman, whose papers gave the name of Marius Voronyi, citizen of Bucharest.

II.

IN THE BREATHLESS quiet that precedes the dawn, in a little stone-walled room lit only by a single candle, a soldier was sitting on a box and polishing a pair of officer's boots. He worked slowly and thoroughly, refreshing himself at intervals from a flask of schnapps. Occasionally he hummed a snatch of song. The only other sounds were the swishing of his cloth and the muffled snoring of the sleepers in the rooms that flanked the corridor. The door of the end room where the soldier worked had been left open, so that he might hear his name if called.

The soldier was a man of strong, lithe build whose alert, smooth-shaven face was temporarily disfig-

ured by several scratches and a huge black eye, to which he raised a cautious finger from time to time. This black eye was a present from his master, Lieutenant General Danyi, commanding the seventeenth corps of the army of the Central European Confederacy. It was a little souvenir of the general's impatience when his orderly had been clumsy with the champagne during an officers' banquet at the Khaskoi Inn.

The orderly, whose name was Alexis, did not hold any grudge because of the black eye. General Danyi had blacked it before; in fact, it was quite a habit when the general had been drinking.

And this night the general had been very drunk indeed. Immediately after striking his servant, he had apologized and offered him a sip of the champagne which had caused the trouble. And at the same time he had made a cryptic remark.

"Alexis, my child," he had said, "drink it down. It is the last drink you will have for a little time. But afterward—there will be drink and gold for every man!"

Afterward! After what? Alexis did not know, for the general hadn't particularized. He pondered the mystery as he worked. It was common knowledge among the troops that something big was in the wind—but nobody knew just what.

For one thing, there was the disappearance—in only one week's time—of four hundred and fifty thousand men. They had gone, one after the other by divisions, into the grim old fortress that stood in the center of Khaskoi Plain. Out of the half million who had assembled for the summer maneuvers, only Alexis's own corps, the seventeenth, now remained. The others had vanished. Alexis had taken his general's words to mean that they would follow.

Well, then, they soon would. It was the part of a good soldier to do what he was told and to ask no questions. Nevertheless, he thought grumblingly, it must be devilishly crowded inside the old fortress!

He continued to polish the boots. They were to be delivered when his master wakened at two thirty. A half hour remained.

From time to time the door creaked on its hinges as the draft stirred it slightly. The candle flickered and smoked, throwing a grotesque shadow of Alexis on the blank wall. The boots continued to grow in luster.

Suddenly the polisher froze. His cloth halted in the middle of a stroke. The hair at the base of his head grew stiff with horror. On the wall there had appeared another shadow next his own—the shadow of a curved hand.

It was moving slowly upward toward him from behind!

Not until the two shadows touched did he free himself from the terror that gripped him. He sprang to his feet and whirled about. But it was too late. A grip of steel clamped his throat and shut off the cry that gurgled there. He felt the sharp prick of a needle driven into his back. He fought madly, but almost at once a swiftly mounting tide of lethargy flowed over him.

His last conscious thought was surprise at the identity of his assailant. It was that pleasant grain salesman, Marius Voronyi. They had had many a pleasant drink together during the past week in the tavern bar, and many a talk as well.

Alexis felt himself hoisted up, and then everything faded away.

CARSON DANE lost not a moment. He deposited the unconscious soldier in his bed and went swiftly

to work. He was playing a desperate game—yet he had the conviction that in no other way could he reach the source of the danger he was seeking.

Early during his stay at the Khaskoi Inn he had remarked the happy similarity between himself and General Danyi's orderly and had resolved to use this fortunate coincidence if all else failed. He now studied the face of the unconscious soldier with great concentration. The fellow was smooth shaven; Dane wore a close-trimmed mustache—that would be easy to fix. He shaved, stripped off the man's uniform and dressed himself in it. Then with some candle black he made himself an artistic likeness of Alexis's black eye, adjusted his cap to the proper angle, surveyed himself in the glass.

The result delighted him. Shorn of his mustache, he might have passed for the orderly's twin brother. With the addition of the fake black eye, he was Alexis himself!

He administered another hypodermic to insure at least forty-eight hours of complete insensibility, picked up the boots, and locking the door of the bedroom from the outside, walked quickly down the corridor to the bedroom of the snoring general. It was two thirty, and the critical instant had arrived. As he softly entered the room he willed himself to *feel* that he had indeed changed personalities with Alexis.

The deception succeeded up to his greatest hopes! General Danyi woke in a villainous humor and greeted his supposed orderly with a good round of curses. Dane helped him into his clothes and heard himself called a clumsy dog and narrowly missed another blackened eye.

But a half hour later the staff car was rolling across the dark lonely

plain bearing the general and his orderly in it, and all the latter's fears of detection were at rest.

Fire filled his veins. Life hung on a hair indeed. But his mind remained icy calm, moving like a cold and deadly machine with effortless ease along the path of peril.

As the first high streaks of dawn were staining the eastern sky, the car swung into the outer court of the fortress. A portcullis slid upward and it passed into the immense central square where the seventeenth division was drawn up in full marching regalia.

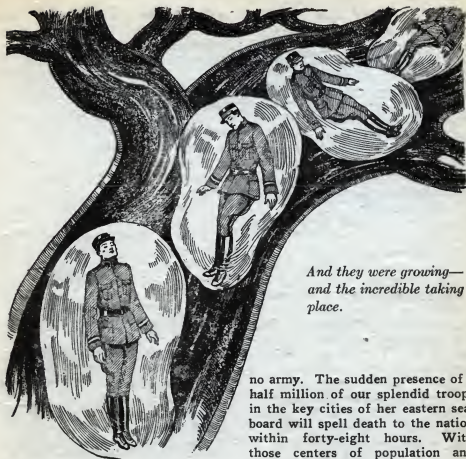
"Remain with the car, Alexis," Danyi ordered. "You will accompany me in the transport plane."

Dane saluted; Danyi walked to the center of the square. The serried ranks clicked to a salute beneath the glare of the floodlights lining the ramparts. There came a pause as twenty-five thousand men watched a powerful bowed figure in civilian clothes shuffle out from behind a row of strange, hooded machines. General Danyi saluted; the civilian bowed stiffly. A thrill shot through Carson Dane. Suspicion that he had arrived in the very nick of time to unearth some gigantic movement hostile to the United States became a positive certainty.

The civilian was Doctor Hugo Presnick.

General Danyi faced the troops. All traces of his recent orgies had disappeared. He was plainly in the grip of an immense excitement.

"Men!" he addressed the armed horde in a ringing voice. "The moment has come for our beloved seventeenth to take its first step in the whirlwind attack which our country is launching secretly against its enemy. Across the ocean lies the greatest and wealthiest land in the world. Behind her impregnable



*And they were growing—
and the incredible taking
place.*

naval and air defenses she has rested secure, growing richer year by year. Would you like those riches for your own? Would you like to see those United States reduced to a humble vassal of the Confederacy?"

A bloodcurdling roar answered him. The troops were straining in their places, heads cocked forward to catch every word. The desire for world dominion, inculcated ceaselessly in every man from the time he left the cradle, glowed in their eyes. The flimsy veneer of civilization had dropped away.

The clamor died as General Danyi raised his hand for silence.

"The United States now maintains

no army. The sudden presence of a half million of our splendid troops in the key cities of her eastern seaboard will spell death to the nation within forty-eight hours. With those centers of population and finance in our hands, the conquest of the remainder of the country will be child's play! There will be gold—gold, and loot, and women—for every man of you!"

Again the roar drowned his voice. He waited until it had died down, and then continued:

"How is this possible? How is this vast army of ours to evade the navy and air fleets which guard the other side of the Atlantic? I can see doubt growing in your faces. We should need fifty ships at the least to carry us there; and fifty ships cannot slip into a country undetected. Quite correct."

He paused dramatically.

"But beside me here is the man

whom we and our descendants shall honor as the Confederacy's greatest patriot. Thanks to the genius of Doctor Presnick, a way has been perfected which will dispense with great lumbering ships entirely. The problem has been reduced to the very simple one of smuggling into that huge country *just ten men!*"

A gasp of astonishment and unbelief went up.

"Doctor Presnick," continued Danyi, "is going to give you first of all a demonstration. Then it will be our turn. You will do your duty. The slightest infraction of discipline, the smallest delaying of the program will mean instant death for the offenders!"

He lifted his hand with a dramatic gesture that embraced the walls. All eyes followed, and Dane could hear a sharp intaking of breath that rose on the dawn air like an enormous sigh. In the shadows beyond the floodlights could be dimly discerned the ugly snouts of machine guns trained on the herd below. A vast sense of uneasiness swept the multitude, a feeling of panic began to grow; but the voice of Doctor Presnick now rang out, and it was checked.

The scientist began his explanation. He spoke as though to a gathering of fellow savants, either heedless of the fact that not one man out of a thousand in the troops could understand his terms, or, more probably, speaking for the officers alone and trusting to the visible demonstration of his skill which was to follow to impress the rabble.

"All of you," he announced, "have heard of my experiments in the reduction of the electron orbit. I have extended this principle now to the organic as well as to the inorganic, to the living as well as to the lifeless. This has been accomplished by

bombarding the atoms of which all matter is composed, by means of a magnetized beam of Heuffler's dark light. Not only do bodies so treated shrink in size, but almost in the same proportion do they lose weight as well; for it is well known since the days of Lorentz and Einstein that the mass of a body is a function of its velocity. Reduce its velocity—or the velocity of its component parts—and you reduce its mass. Weight is nothing but the acceleration of mass due to gravity. Hence, when we reduce an object to one millionth of its former size, we cause it to weigh nearly as little as well. Now, behold!"

He signaled to his white-coated aids, and the front of one of the hooded machines was swung open. There was revealed a space of about the shape and size of a man's body with a coiled glass tube encircling it. One of the assistants took his place in the machine, and the door was swung shut and bolted.

Doctor Presnick threw in a switch, and the stutter of a vacuum tube sounded through the breathless stillness that enveloped the watching host. The ghastly blue-green light of a mercury tube played across the tense faces.

At the end of half a minute, the scientist threw out the switch, the light flicked off, the snapping of the tube died away. He swung open the door.

A gasp like a great involuntary moan trembled in the air. *The machine was empty!*

Men stared at one another and a babel of excited voices rose. General Danyi checked it with a curt command. Presnick was beaming delightedly behind his thick spectacles. He reached into the machine and picked up a small glass vial at one of the electrodes.

"Observe this liquid," he said, holding it aloft. "It is a solution of common salt and water. The man you so lately saw in the flesh is now a tiny metallic ion in this solution. He is ready for transportation. The air in his lungs will last him for months and months in his slowed-down state of animation. He possesses neither consciousness nor bodily needs. As the reduction process began he was sprayed with a solution of the silver salts. This has formed a tough metallic shell about him. I shake the glass—so—but he is well protected. Observe, now, the next step in the process."

Again he signed to his aids. A heavy steel door clanged somewhere behind him, and out into the glare of the floodlights shuffled a little group of men.

Carson Dane caught his breath at the sight of them. A flash of light burst through his laboring brain. Those dull, oxlike faces—the shuffling, shambling gait—the squinted, painfully staring eyes! He had seen them before on that grisly evening in Washington when he had been an unsuspected observer of a catastrophe whose meaning was becoming clearer to him every moment!

Doctor Presnick ran his eye over the group which stood awkwardly gaping before him. Then, taking one by the arm, he led him to an operating table which had been trundled out. The rest of the group, nine in number, were herded off once more to somewhere within the fortress. The scientist began to speak again.

"This man is an imbecile from the Moldavian valley. The others are also imbeciles from the same district—some of them members of the same family. They have been altered in their glandular structure by me for the purpose of rendering

them more docile and to effect certain chemical changes in their metabolism. They have all been subnormal since birth, and under ordinary circumstances would have lived and died in complete obscurity. But science has lifted them to a more glorious fate; they are to die for their country instead. I have selected these men as carriers of the army."

A tourniquet was applied to the little finger of the giant's left hand while Doctor Presnick drew up into a hypodermic needle the salt solution remaining after the disappearance of his white-coated assistant in the previous demonstration. He plunged the full needle into the ligatured finger.

"It is obvious to all of you now what my plan is," he said. "*These men carry in their blood the army of the Confederacy.*"

"Twenty-four divisions have already been implanted there. I am going now to let you see the other half of the process—the return to animation and normal size of an implanted man.

"My assistant is somewhere in the blood of the little finger of this hand. There are other human ions in it also, without doubt; but him you will recognize by his costume."

He turned to his chief assistant. "Amputate the little finger. The implanted man will be held in the finger by means of the ligature."

Amid a tense silence, the operation was deftly performed. The severed finger was placed on a metal platform close to the high blank wall of the fortress in full view of the multitude. Doctor Presnick adjusted a boxlike device mounted on a tripod and resembling greatly an ordinary motion-picture camera.

"Now," he said, "we are ready. This box is my invention. Observe

its extreme portability. Yet it contains two immense sources of energy. One of these is a magnetic projector by means of which an intense magnetic field can be created and focused at any distance up to a kilometer. The other source of energy is the 'Presnick Ray'—at the extreme upper end of the invisible spectrum. The dark light, in the red end, was used in reducing the electron orbits; the Presnick Ray restores them to normal."

He peered into a telescope mounted on the box's upper surface and adjusted its focus.

"Observe now the miracles of science!" he cried in a ringing voice. The air was filled with a deep humming as he turned a switch. "I focus the magnetic beam—it draws the metal ions to the surface of the flesh. I bathe them in the Presnick Ray—the electron orbits expand to normal, causing——"

A terrible, convulsive cry of amazement and delirious excitement rose from the ranks and drowned his words.

Carson Dane felt the hackles of his neck rise with freezing horror. The finger was growing huge! It had been lying, nail upward on the platform—a tiny bit of bloody flesh. Now it shook convulsively. Great lumps appeared in it. The stretched skin was suddenly rent asunder by a mass of upward-shooting columns of silvery gray. These swayed together, growing at an appalling rate. They were a yard high now! Two yards!

The next moment the silver shells had split open, and from them staggered forth more than fourscore men in the uniform of the Confederacy—soldiers of the first division.

And in their midst was a man in a white surgeon's coat—the assistant who had vanished from the sight of

mortals only five minutes before. Now he had come back again—and from a shadow land more strange than ever man's brain had before conceived.

The effect upon the watching troops was terrific. They laughed and shrieked hysterically as the tension broke. Some groveled on the ground and hid their faces in unbelieving horror; others broke ranks and darted forward to see and touch their fellows and assure themselves that their senses did not lie.

And Carson Dane was shaken to the very marrow by a terrible fear—a frightful panic-terror at the responsibility which fate had laid upon his shoulders. The scheme was perfect; alone and unaided, only he now stood between the United States and her certain extinction.

Even time was lacking. A day, at the most, would be consumed by the implanting of the last division, and perhaps fifteen hours in the crossing of the ocean. A pitifully short span of hours! But the old iron of his nature reasserted itself. He was alone—yes—but he was desperate and resourceful.

The commanders of the secret army, their dozen or two of orderlies and a few others would make the transatlantic journey in their normal forms. Somehow he must contrive to turn that item to his advantage. Otherwise——

III.

DAY CAME, hot and calm, as the sun climbed into the cloudless sky. The gruesome work got under way. The grim machine guns, brooding on the walls like somber buzzards waiting for a corpse, spoke only once—and the incipient revolt of frightened men died still-born. The task

proceeded with a smooth, unhurried efficiency. It had become a routine affair.

Throughout that terrible and swift-flying day, Carson Dane moved with every nerve and sense alert. He anticipated every order of his commander; he was everywhere at once. The general and his staff waited only until the process of implantation was fairly begun, and then retired to take their ease in the coolness of the fortress. Between their tables and the kitchen, the orderlies scurried in an endless line. All restraint of speech was at an end; plans were openly discussed in every group.

When lunch was over, General Danyi indulged in a siesta, and Dane found himself momentarily at liberty. He wandered out into the courtyard and surveyed the amazing scene. Already the division had shrunk by more than half. He had overheard that the work must be completed by sunset. Weather conditions over the Atlantic were perfect, and the squadron of three planes was to cross that very night. The thought gave him a feeling of nausea. Time was flying.

A sentry paced back and forth before the storeroom; another was overlooking the loading of the deadly Presnick projectors into one of the huge transport planes which had been rolled into the square to expedite the process. Carson Dane strolled over near it with affected casualness and engaged the guards in conversation. They eyed him with the contempt the fighting man feels for a valet, but grunted a few replies to his careless questions.

There were fifteen of the projectors, and Dane was struck again by their resemblance to large box cameras, now that the supporting tripods had been removed. It was

inconceivable that such gigantic sources of energy could have such commonplace exteriors! Yet within those dull walls the Presnick Ray danced restlessly in its quartz tube, awaiting only the turning of a switch to fling its powerful beam across the void of space. Force incalculable—in the compass of a bread box! The idea fascinated him.

He counted the boxes once more. Fifteen. The means of calling back to life a half million of savage fighting men. Somehow—anyhow—he must destroy these fiendish instruments.

A steel crowbar was lying beside the cases. For one wild second he considered a swift leap for it. Unconsciously his muscles tensed. But the sentry, aware of electric tautness near him, swung around with a muttered warning. The moment of opportunity passed. Other moments followed swiftly behind it. The day grew old.

At sunset, Dane found himself with a pair of the deadly instruments actually in his arms as he followed General Danyi into the plane for the take-off. But the other projectors of the fifteen were in the other ships and all opportunity of destroying them en masse was gone forever.

The trio of ships took off.

At ten thousand feet they swung westward and took up formation. In the middle plane, the ten dull-witted carriers lay, shackled to their bunks, grunting and slobbering like beasts, mercifully ignorant of the awful martyrdom that awaited them a few hours hence. Among them moved their evil genius and his deft assistants, like witch mothers watching over some hellish brood.

In the flanking planes rode the staff officers, with the precious projectors in their personal care; their

orderlies, the field clerks and mechanics. The three ships moved like gray ghosts through the night skies, all lights curtained, slipping over the dark fringes of the southern mountains and off across the broad Atlantic at upward of four hundred miles an hour. The smallest and deadliest armada of all human history was approaching its goal.

GENERAL DANYI was hungry and cross—and Carson Dane had in his dry mouth the bitter dregs of despair.

A rough calculation showed the secret agent that he had but a scant hour left in which to formulate and put into execution some plan to stop this invasion destined to spell slavery to his homeland. He was unarmed. The destruction of one or two of the projectors would be unavailing. They must all be destroyed if he was to render—

His mind gave a leap!

Like lightning crossing a stormy sky came the flash of inspiration. He realized that he had been staring fixedly at the bread box on the galley shelf in front of him. Fragments of an earlier thought boiled in his head. And then, suddenly, he had it! A plan, complete in its potentialities, had been conceived in that instant flash of inspiration.

With his heart pounding hard from excitement, he entered the small cabin assigned to his commander. General Danyi was at the table, a map of the Carolina coast propped open in front of him, slippers on his feet.

Dane picked up the general's field boots and the kit of polishing cloths, brushes, and bottles, and returned to the galley.

He went swiftly to work. In two minutes the white enamel cake box had been smeared with blacking and

was drying out to a dull metallic luster. The resemblance to one of the projectors was even more than he had hoped for. Suppressing a cry of triumph, he cleaned the boots, laid them across his arm, and slipped the cake box underneath the apron he wore. With a prayer for luck, he reentered the cabin.

As he approached the sofa underneath which the projectors had been stored, the boots appeared to slip from his grasp. He made frantic efforts to recover them but they crashed to the floor and he on top of them. A table went over, spilling the after-dinner coffee in its fall.

General Danyi cursed like a madman. He bestowed a few stiff kicks upon his orderly's anatomy. But Dane quickly recovered the slippery boots and placed them neatly beneath the couch. Then, avoiding further kicks and blows, he scuttled back to the galley out of harm's way, followed by a torrent from Danyi.

But as the curtain that served for a galley door fell into place, a terrible smile played for a second across the secret agent's face. For it was not the cake box which he drew from beneath the folds of his apron. The humble cake box was now reposing beneath the general's couch—and one of the Presnick projectors was in the hands of a desperate and dangerous man!

There was not a moment to lose. At any moment the substitution might be discovered and everything lost. He must act instantly. Wrapping the projector in a dishcloth to conceal its nature, Dane slipped quietly out of the galley and made his way forward along the narrow corridor that transected the body of the huge plane.

There was a continual coming and going here. On either side of this central aisle small cubicles similar to

that occupied by General Danyi opened off, and Dane, hurrying past, had a fleeting glimpse of fat officers stuffing themselves with food and wine in anticipation of a strenuous and bloody morrow.

He reached the forward end of the corridor. There was a closed door in the bulkhead there. Waiting for a moment to make sure that he was unobserved, he quickly swung the door open and stepped through.

The roar of the motors beat-upon his ears. He was in a small chart room, and a man was seated at a table holding dividers to a chart. As Dane stepped through the door he looked up in surprise and annoyance, switching the little hooded lamp on the table about so that he could get a better look at his totally unexpected visitor.

But he had time neither to see nor to cry out. Dane was on him like a whirlwind of fury. The secret agent's right fist, clamping a steel rod, came down in one single swift blow. There was a gurgle that died before it became a word, and the navigator slumped to the floor. Dane bent over him. The man was dead, his skull shattered by that terrific blow.

With the fellow's automatic in his possession now, Dane paused only to lock the door in the bulkhead behind him and then went on. Another short corridor led him between the fuel tanks and to the entrance of the control cockpit. He had a glimpse of the back of the pilot at the controls, and moved swiftly upon him.

Twice the butt of the automatic swished through the air and impacted against bone. The great ship trembled and nosed forward. Dane swung the limp body of the pilot clear of the wheel and slipped into his place. The trembling ceased;

the plane swung back on an even keel. He steadied her for a moment, then locked the controls and threw on the gyrostabilizer.

He was in control of the monster ship and armed with a weapon of inconceivable deadliness!

Propping the projector in the frame of the central port, he quickly focused it on the dim, dark outline of the carrier ship just ahead. Then, with a prayer on his lips, he threw in the switch.

THE DEEP HUM of the magnetic field rose even above the roar of the wind. Dane kept his eyes glued to the telescopic finder, focusing the tremendous forces just inside the shell of the other ship. His breath came fast; his heart pounded furiously. His mind balked at visualizing the awful scene that he knew was taking place in the craft that winged on ahead.

Five hundred thousand men were being recreated there, ten thousand feet above the sea, and in the tiny, cramped space of a single airplane!

The seconds dragged by like eons. And then suddenly the plane in front of him was no more. It had disintegrated in midair—rent into a million pieces by that mass of expanding human flesh!

Carson Dane had but a second's glimpse of it—a dark mass writhing horribly as it plunged like a plummet into the abyss of water.

He leaned back in his seat and wiped the sweat from his brow.

America was safe. Whatever happened now, the army of invasion had been destroyed and had carried with it to a terrible fate the mad genius of its creator.

But there was work still to be done. The other plane was circling back. The disaster had been seen. Dane swung the magnetic beam up-

ward and focused it on the ship's great metal nose. The two planes drew together. Then slowly the secret agent began to maneuver the other ship downward while its pilot fought desperately at its controls, helpless in the grip of that invisible and deadly magnetic beam.

Downward and downward it lurched, following the invisible hand that drew it on. And then a great gray comber licked it down into a wet embrace, the dark water surged over it, and rolled smoothly on.

Dane cut the magnetic beam just in time to avoid the same fate and spiraled upward with his motors roaring at their utmost strength.

Shouts and cries came faintly to his ears. The bulkhead door behind him was bending and buckling beneath the blows rained upon it. Suddenly it burst open with a crash, and men came milling into the narrow

corridor. A pistol bullet clipped past his ear.

He jerked the great ship up into a vertical zoom. The corridor cleared itself as if by magic in one wild maelstrom of slipping, scrambling, clutching bodies. The plane snapped down out of a stall, and Dane winged her over in a barrel roll. Then he spun her downward through a dizzy half mile and back to an even keel once more.

No more bullets came through the bulkhead door.

The low black line of a flat coast appeared ahead. Carson Dane set the ship into a flat glide toward it.

He felt infinitely weary, but utterly content.

Day was coming. One hundred and fifty million people would waken to security, peace, and plenty because of the faithful servant now winging home above their heads.

Some Ghosts Explained

AN INFREQUENT phenomenon which has caused a great many people to believe in ghosts is what is known as "ball lightning." During a thunderstorm, what seems to be a ball of fire will either roll along the ground or float through the air. In one reported instance this ball of fire, a little larger than a football, rolled in the front door of a farmhouse, through a hall, and out the back door, vanishing before the horrified eyes of the man who watched it. In another it was seen to roll along the ground until it reached a sheep that happened to be in its path. There was a loud explosion, and the sheep was killed. Lightning, however, has done stranger things than this. To it was traced responsibility for the spooky fact that the face of a woman many months dead was seen clearly delineated in the pane of a window of her house. Her husband remembered that, just before her death, on a day when she had worn the dress that was in the windowpane portrait, she had been looking out the window at him when lightning struck a tree in the yard. A scientific examination revealed that the lightning had photographed her, the windowpane serving as a photographic plate. Although not visible for months, the photograph eventually "developed" itself.

*The massive
membranous thing
hunched on top of
the cougar was a
vision of pure
horror*



The Purple Brain

by Hal K. Wells

TINY RIPPLES of nameless horror coursed shiveringly down Neil Andrews's spine as he rode along through the gloom of the late twilight. His horse snorted in blind terror. Neil could feel the big black trembling in every muscle.

John Kincaid turned in his saddle. "Cougar somewhere near, Neil," he commented in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper

"With any luck, we might get a shot at the brute!"

Neil silently nodded, though Kincaid's words had brought little of real assurance. Cougars were fairly plentiful in these southern California mountains, and the nearness of one of the big cats could easily explain the horses' panic. But no mere mountain lion could possibly explain that feeling of nameless dread that was surging over Neil in

swiftly increasing intensity with every foot of their progress along the narrow, winding forest trail.

Neil Andrews was no tenderfoot to be scared into hysteria by the proximity of a cougar. The last five of Neil's twenty-eight years had been spent in the jungles of three continents, working as a mining engineer in the widespread organization of John Kincaid. Those five years had brought a deep tan to Neil's lean, sensitive face, a finely tempered strength to his tall, lithe body, and a case-hardened steel to his nerves, proof against the animal terrors of any wilderness trail. He was certain that there was something beyond any prowling cougar abroad in the dark forest near them, something with an eerie menace that was utterly alien.

If Kincaid felt the aura of strange dread, he gave no indication of it as he swung his mount into a swift trot along the trail. Neil silently followed him, the impact of their horses' feet nearly noiseless in the deep loam. The intangible feeling of creeping horror swiftly mounted. It seemed to have acquired definite direction now, with its source somewhere just around a curve in the narrow trail fifty yards ahead.

Kincaid sent his horse into a dead gallop with an abruptness that caught Neil by surprise. By the time he could spur his own trembling mount forward in pursuit, Kincaid was vanishing around the bend in the trail. A moment later Neil rounded the turn, then reined in with a sharpness that sent his horse back upon its haunches.

The trail opened into a small natural clearing. At the near end of the clearing, John Kincaid fought with one hand to subdue the frenzied plunges of his fear-maddened horse, while with his other

hand he snatched for the heavy automatic pistol at his hip.

In the center of the clear space, some ten yards away, crouched a nightmare thing that sent stark horror surging through Neil's brain in an icy flood.

CROUCHED almost flat upon the ground, with mighty muscles tensing for a spring, and eyes shining yellow fire in the gloom, was a giant cougar. The great cat was a striking picture of snarling menace, but Neil had eyes only for the incredible thing that rode the cougar's head and shoulders.

In shape it was suggestive of a colossal brain, some four feet in diameter. The great sac seemed partly plastic, its form molding itself to fit the contours of the cougar's neck and shoulders. The forward portion of the brain thing bulged upward above the cougar's head, with the bottom edge of the sac embedded within the top of the great cat's skull.

The thing glowed with an eerie purple luminescence like a great blob of luminous jelly. Its surface rippled in ceaseless flowing motion that suggested the rapid pulsing of a heart. Somewhere deep within the glowing purple bulk Neil could sense the presence of an utterly alien entity of incredible power and overwhelming evil. And from that malignant entity emanated an invisible aura of cosmic horror which struck Neil's brain almost with the impact of a physical blow.

The crash of Kincaid's heavy pistol abruptly broke the spell. Neil saw the cougar stagger as the slug tore into its side. Then both horses went stark crazy, and succeeding events became a swift blur to Neil. There was a moment of crashing chaos while Kincaid emptied his pis-

tol in one continuous rippling burst of fire. Neil was vaguely aware that the cougar was rearing upward on its hind legs in what seemed a deliberate effort to shield its horrible rider by taking the impact of the bullets in its own body. Then Neil's maddened horse went completely out of control.

There was a surge of savage frenzy in which no horseman could have kept his seat. Neil was sent hurtling bodily from the saddle. He struck the ground with such force that for a moment he wavered dazedly upon the brink of unconsciousness. Then he grimly rallied his senses and staggered groggily to his feet.

The clearing was empty. The cougar, with its eerie purple rider, was gone. Neil heard the rapid drumming of horses' feet fleeing into the distance, followed by a steady and sincere burst of profanity in John Kincaid's booming voice from somewhere back around the turn in the trail.

Neil found Kincaid standing in the middle of the trail, gingerly feeling himself over in search of broken bones.

"Nothing busted, I guess," he grunted as Neil came up. "First time I've been thrown in thirty years, but I'll swear no man living could have stayed on the back of that nag. I never saw a horse quite so plumb loco!"

"What was that—that purple thing?" Neil asked dazedly.

Kincaid slowly shook his head. "I don't know, Neil," he answered. "But I do know one thing. Whatever the nature of that purple abomination is, it was created by a certain gentleman by the name of Yaagir."

"The man-of-mystery chap who moved into the old Clark lodge?"

"Yes. I've heard of that shimmering purple thing before, but I thought the story was all moonshine. José told me about——"

Kincaid broke off abruptly as a startling interruption came from the valley below them. It was the high-pitched scream of a man who was apparently in the last extremity of terror. The scream was suddenly cut off by a peculiar sharp report that sounded like the crack of a whip.

Kincaid jammed a new magazine into his pistol.

"That scream was from somewhere near my lodge!" he grated. "Come on!"

THEY PLUNGED down the wooded slope at a headlong gait that made conversation impossible, crashing heedlessly through underbrush as they took the shortest possible cut. Five minutes later they emerged into the valley where the lodges of both Kincaid and Yaagir were located, the only dwellings within a radius of ten miles.

Just ahead of them was the low stone fence that marked the boundary between the two properties. Two hundred yards to their left, the lighted windows of Kincaid's lodge glowed warmly yellow in the gloom. To the right of the stone fence the ground sloped sharply upward in a small mound, with Yaagir's lodge located on the summit. The building seemed dark and deserted.

Kincaid halted. "That scream and shot came from right about here," he said. "Trespassing be hanged! We're investigating!"

They vaulted the low stone fence and began searching the scattered clumps of underbrush. It was Neil who first saw the long, tawny shape stretched out in a thicket. His low exclamation brought Kincaid.

Kincaid held his pistol ready as they cautiously parted the brush, but there was no need for the weapon. The body of the cougar was stone dead. Kincaid's bullets had shattered the brute's chest so completely in the battle back on the trail that it was inconceivable how the big cat had been able to travel this far before collapsing.

The glowing, purple brain thing was gone, but the cougar's body bore marks of its former rider. The tawny fur was completely gone from neck and shoulders where the thing had ridden, leaving the bare hide darkly discolored, and oddly granular to the touch. The entire top of the cougar's head was cut away in a circle as clean as if made by a surgeon's knife.

Just beyond the cougar's body was the huddled figure of a man. They pulled away the brush for a closer look at the body. It was a muscular, swarthy figure, apparently that of a Mexican or an Indian. There was an intricate emblem tattooed on one bare forearm. But the thing that made their faces blanch was the fact that the body was completely headless! Where the neck ended, the flesh was of a peculiar crystalline texture, sparkling rather faintly in the dusk.

Death had occurred only a matter of minutes before, for the body was still warm. Kincaid's face was stern as he rose from inspecting the body.

"That was José, one of the two boys at my lodge," he said grimly. "That purple thing that rode the cougar is more than just a hideous monstrosity, Neil. It is a killer, capable of inflicting instant death!"

John Kincaid turned determinedly away. "Come on. We're returning to the house. This is a matter for the authorities now."

They vaulted back over the low stone fence, then stopped short as they saw two figures approaching from the direction of the Kincaid lodge. One of the figures was a tall, swarthy individual whose high cheek bones denoted mixed Indian and Mexican blood. The other was a slender, dark-haired girl with an oval face of piquant beauty. The man was carrying a machete.

"Jean and Manuel!" Kincaid exclaimed in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you folks, of course," Jean Kincaid answered. "When a girl's father and her fiancé go riding off into the woods and their horses come back riderless and half crazy, what would you expect the girl to do—sit calmly down and twiddle her thumbs?"

"*Sí, señor,*" Manuel added volubly. "When the horses came back, we were worried. They were so badly frightened, it was not safe to ride them, so we started on foot. We thought we had heard a scream and a shot from near here, so we came this way."

Jean's face sobered as she saw the strained expression on Kincaid's face. "Something's wrong, dad," she said quietly. "What is it?"

"Murder, I'm afraid," Kincaid answered. He briefly told of their encounter with the cougar and its weird rider, and the finding of José's headless body. Manuel's face hardened until it was like granite. Neil remembered then that José had been Manuel's brother. The two men had been caretakers at Kincaid's lodge.

"There is something hideously wrong there in that old lodge of Yaagir's," Kincaid said gravely. "You and Neil had not heard the rumors, Jean, because it's all happened in the last several months."

But I was up here for a couple of days last week. During the short time since Yaagir first moved in here, the man's weird personality and the strange lights and sounds emanating from his place have started all sorts of wild stories circulating. I didn't mention them to you before because I thought they were tommyrot.

"José had the wildest tale of the lot," Kincaid continued. "He told me that he sneaked up to Yaagir's lodge one night and looked in the window. He described something that I know now must have been that purple thing we saw on the cougar, but it wasn't on any mountain lion when José saw it. It was riding a creature so inhumanly monstrous that I laughed José's entire story away as being nothing but a nightmare caused by smoking too much *marijuana*."

"Even I laughed at what José told," Manuel agreed somberly.

"But now it begins to look like José's tale may have been cold fact," Kincaid said. "We'll soon know definitely just what kind of a monstrosity Yaagir is keeping up there in that den of his. I'm sending for the authorities to come out here tonight."

"I hardly think we will need the authorities, Mr. Kincaid," a resonant voice broke in smoothly.

STARTLED, they whirled to see a tall figure confronting them some ten feet away.

"Yaagir!" Kincaid exclaimed, his hand drifting toward his holstered pistol.

The figure facing them was a strikingly incongruous one. The dark clothing was orthodox enough, but the headdress was a voluminous affair somewhat like an Oriental turban, bulging high above the fore-

head, and with heavy folds of cloth coming far down over each shoulder. The man's bronzed, impassive face looked like that of a full-blooded Navajo Indian. The startling feature in that face, however, was the eyes. Oddly lusterless, and completely devoid of all expression, they looked like the eyes of a dead man.

"I believe we can take care of the situation ourselves," Yaagir said suavely. "Let me show you."

The gesture of his outflung hand was so deceptively careless that it caught his listeners completely off guard. Neil had only a blurred glimpse of the small object that flashed toward them. It looked like a bubble of silvered glass, about the size of a golf ball. It burst with a dull plop at their feet. Milky vapor seethed up around them in a billowing cloud.

Neil tried to leap to one side, but the swift paralysis of the vapor turned his muscles to water. As he sprawled helplessly forward, he was dimly aware that Kincaid and Jean were falling beside him, Kincaid's pistol dropping from his limp fingers.

Neil's sense of vision was fading rapidly as he lay there inert and helpless. He had a dim glimpse of a dark figure rushing at Yaagir from the side with machete lifted high, and realized that the vapor cloud must have missed Manuel.

Yaagir dodged swiftly backward. A black tube flashed up in his hand. From its tip, a tiny ball of blazing green fire streaked toward Manuel. Neil dimly heard a whip-crack report and saw Manuel's body stiffen.

Then darkness closed over Neil's brain, but not before his fading vision had revealed a final and terrible thing. Yaagir's movement in dodging Manuel's attack had brought

him under the low branches of an evergreen. One of the limbs caught in his headdress, dragged it bodily away.

And there, crouched in pulsing horror on the back of Yaagir's head and shoulders, was a shimmering, brain-shaped thing of luminescent purple!

FOR WHAT seemed æons of time, Neil's brain drifted in lightless, soundless oblivion. Then an electric tingling vibrated through his body, and consciousness returned in a surging rush. He opened his eyes.

For a moment he blinked dazedly in what seemed a chaos of gleaming gold mechanisms and glittering white walls. He was seated upright in a big, solidly built chair, and bound in such a manner that, though his arms and legs were free, his body was lashed immovably to the chair back. Bound in similar chairs on either side of him were Kincaid and Jean. And standing in the center of the big room in front of the three prisoners was a figure of sheer nightmare horror.

The creature was naked except for a breech-clout, in the belt of which was thrust the small black tube weapon that had struck Manuel down. The massive, muscular legs were those of a man, but from the waist up all semblance to normal humanity ceased.

There were two bodies rising from that waist, spreading slightly apart as they rose like the arms of a tall, narrow "Y." The four hands of the figure were grotesquely altered parodies of human members. Three of them had fingers so lengthened and many-jointed that they had almost the supple flexibility of tentacles. In the fourth hand the fingers were merged into two

thick digits, and the thumb developed far beyond normal size, resulting in a three-pronged claw of tremendous power.

The two heads bore solid, swarthy faces that were human enough except for their stony lack of all expression and the utter deadness of their staring eyes. Suspended between the heads in a peculiar hammocklike affair of metallic cloth was the bulbous form of the gleaming, purple brain thing. From each side of its main bulk, blunt protoplasmic arms extended to the tops of the two human heads.

The thing itself was vibrant with eerie life. Deep within it a spot of brighter purple flamed and ebbed like the swift beating of some strange heart, and in rhythm with those beats, tiny pulsations of shimmering movement rippled constantly over the membranous outer surface. There was a weird beauty in the ceaseless play of that soft purple fire, but it was a beauty that was submerged in the aura of nameless horror that poured from the thing, the same overpowering horror that Neil had felt in the battle with the cougar, but now intensified a hundredfold.

"The monster that José told of seeing through the window!" Kincaid exclaimed huskily. "And even Yaagir himself has fallen a victim to the ghastly thing he created!"

Neil looked on past the two-headed figure then, and for the first time saw Yaagir's tall, thin body stretched motionless on a cot over against one wall of the room. His naked skull was scarred in the same peculiar manner as that of the dead cougar, with the entire top of the head cut away in a clean circle that laid bare the upper membrane of the brain.

"Yaagir a victim?" The voice

came from one of the heads of the twin-bodied creature. "I am Yaa-gir. That thing"—one of the tentacle-fingered hands gestured contemptuously toward the cot—"is nothing but a *garroh*, a physical body that I put on or off as you would a garment. I secured it when I first came to your Earth, and used it as a disguise on the few occasions that I have had to come in close contact with humankind. But here in my laboratory I wear this vastly more efficient synthetic *garroh* that I fashioned from the bodies of two peons whom I took from the ranch country south of here."

There was a pause.

"We of the great race of Zaas have no bodies of our own." There was a strong note of arrogant pride in the voice of the monstrosity. "Our composition is almost purely cerebral. We use the bodies of lesser creatures to serve our physical needs. We first destroy all the higher mental powers of such a creature; then, by means of direct contact between our tissues and the brain of the *garroh*, we come into complete possession of its body. Its muscles move as we direct. We hear with its ears, see through its eyes, feel through its nerves. We can change from *garroh* to *garroh* as quickly and easily as you can change from one suit of clothes to another.

"That body on the cot is not dead. It is merely dormant, awaiting the time when I shall need it and wear it again."

"But where is this land of Zaas of which you spoke?" Kincaid asked dazedly.

"Zaas is a planet that circles about a small Sun at a point in space six light years distant from Earth," Yaa-gir answered. "Our race is one of enormous longevity, and for a

million years the great problem of Zaas has been to find room for its ever-expanding population. We soon colonized all the available planets in the neighborhood of our own Sun. Then, in desperation, the wise ones of Zaas sent individual scouts far out into the void of interstellar space, seeking new worlds to which our race might spread.

"I am one of those scouts," Yaa-gir continued. "My search has been a long and weary one. Though there are countless planets among the teeming suns of the universe, there is a very small proportion of those planets that is adapted to our needs. Not only must we have proper atmosphere, temperature, and other natural factors, but we must also have a planet peopled with creatures suitable for our use as *garrohs*. It was not until I came to the planet Earth that I finally found a world ideally fitted to our purposes. Now I have only to return and make my report to the wise ones. Then in a very few years the space ships of Zaas will come speeding to Earth in a mighty armada.

"The three of you are returning to Zaas with me," Yaa-gir concluded; "but not in the flesh. In a very few minutes now you will see what I mean."

THE GROTESQUE, twin-bodied figure turned away from the prisoners and strode over to where a short flight of steps led up to a heavily barred door in one of the walls. Yaa-gir stooped and picked up a human body from where it had been concealed beside the steps. As Yaa-gir turned, they saw that the figure in his arms was that of Manuel.

Half of the man's side had been shattered and incrustated with dia-

mond dust by the explosion of the fiery green pellet from the tube weapon. Faint, shallow breathing indicated that Manuel was still alive, though apparently in a deep coma. The machete was still grasped in the rigid fingers of his hand.

Handling Manuel's heavy bulk with an ease that told of the muscular power in Yaagir's weird body, he carried it over to where a large, square plate of coppery metal was set in the floor. He pried Manuel's fingers open and flung the machete over in a far corner of the room, then began working with an upright apparatus that looked like the arm of a gallows projecting out over the floor plate.

The three prisoners watched him in silence, dazedly trying to realize the incredible nature of that weird brain thing. Around them, on every side, was ample proof of the truth of Yaagir's amazing story. Every detail of the scattered apparatus in the big room was obviously the product of a science utterly different from any science known to Earth.

Trained engineer that Neil was, the nature of the mechanisms left him completely bewildered. They were strikingly compact and simple. The central piece was a great diamondlike crystal prism, between four and five feet in diameter, with slender cables running to various pieces of mechanism scattered about the floor.

From the size and shape of the big oblong room, Neil believed that it must be a chamber hollowed out in the ground under the lodge. Through an open door in the end wall he saw another smaller room containing a big globe of some semi-transparent substance that had the sheen and color of amber.

As Yaagir worked with Manuel's body, he chatted idly with his captives.

"To-night's events forced me to finish my work on Earth a little more hurriedly than I had planned," he explained. "My experiment in using the cougar as a *garroh* was a foolish and dangerous adventure, for a cougar has no hands with which to carry weapons. I was practically defenseless in that encounter with you, and I was lucky to escape alive.

"The one whom you call José was hiding in the bushes, and saw me change from the cougar's body back to my human *garroh*; so, in order to silence his lips, I had to kill him. Then when you found his body, I found myself facing a still greater problem. Killing you or merely holding you captive would inevitably result in a hue and cry that would make further work here impossible for me. Fortunately my work upon Earth was nearly finished. Only one real task remained, and you yourselves were the exact material I needed for that final work.

"So I decided to bring you here and definitely end my labors to-night," Yaagir finished. One of the long hands gestured idly back to the amber globe in the next room. "My space ship is waiting and ready for the return to Zaas. The last thing before I leave the laboratory, I shall start the mechanism of an atomic time bomb. Two minutes later there will be an explosion that will blast away this lodge and all its contents, leaving no telltale evidence to warn Earth that an alien visitor has been here. Your planet's first knowledge of the impending danger will come when the hordes of Zaas come swooping into your stratosphere in a relentless attack

that will forever end the reign of your puny race upon this world."

MANUEL'S BODY was now suspended from the overhead arm by loops of gold-colored cable passing around his chest under the arms, while other cables stretched his arms out to the sides.

Yaagir wheeled forward two small portable pieces of apparatus and set them in position at the edge of the floor plate. One was a boxlike device with a cluster of lenses in its front wall. The other was a long-barreled instrument with a cone-shaped muzzle that looked like a machine gun mounted on a wheeled tripod. There were two small switchlike levers on the right side of the metal barrel, one colored white, the other black. Both the lens box and the gun mechanism were connected with the central diamond prism by long floor cables.

"If your stupid race of Earthlings possessed the secret of that prism, you would not be such helpless *garroh* material for the conquering hordes from Zaas," Yaagir remarked arrogantly. "Its principle is simple. The crystal collects and concentrates those universal vibrations that you call 'cosmic rays.' The power so collected is then transmitted directly to these various mechanisms."

Yaagir focused the lens device, then aimed the coniform muzzle of the other mechanism at Manuel's body and manipulated the small white lever. There was a sibilant hiss, and the clothing on Manuel's arms and shoulders vanished in tiny wisps of smoke. The hissing rose in volume. Neil's eyes bulged as he saw that from the shoulders upward Manuel's dangling figure was literally being flayed alive—his skin dissolving like melting wax before

the invisible rays from the long-barreled projector!

"And now perhaps you understand what I meant when I said that I am taking you back to Zaas, but not in the flesh," Yaagir remarked. "Taking your living bodies in my small space ship would be impossible, yet the wise ones of Zaas demand that they actually see with their own eyes all anatomical details of any race of prospective *garrohs*. That lens there functions somewhat like one of your so-called moving-picture cameras, and records the pictures the wise ones need.

"This *garroh*"—Yaagir indicated Manuel—"is so badly marred that I can use only his head and shoulders. But with you three I can make perfect, complete recordings of your entire bodies."

Yaagir's voice was blotted out in the sibilant hissing of more power being turned on. An overwhelming wave of scarlet fury surged through Neil as he realized the unspeakably hideous fate that Yaagir was so cold-bloodedly planning for his prisoners. In a blind, mad effort of berserk rage, Neil flung himself forward against the thin, strong metal cable that bound him to the chair.

For a moment the bonds held as rigidly immovable as though anchored in granite. Then abruptly a thrill of startled hope made Neil's heart leap. Unless his imagination had played him false, there had been a faint, barely perceptible yielding in the wood of the chair back.

Neil quickly investigated by cautiously cramming an exploring hand in back of him. The chair, like those in which Jean and Kincaid sat, was a massive upright armchair of rustic design, built from thick, round pieces of undressed pine. The furniture had for years occupied the living room of the old

Clark lodge, left there by the former owner of the place.

Yaagir had apparently relied upon the heavy weight of the chairs being sufficient to hold his prisoners, for his method of binding them was of the simplest kind. A thin cable of flexible metal was looped twice around Neil's waist, then the free ends drawn tightly back and fastened around the thick piece of wood that formed the center rod of the chair back.

Yaagir's investigation of Earthly phenomena might have been profound enough in other respects, but he had apparently failed to learn one important fact—that mountain pine which has been long dried out often has a tendency to succumb to internal dry rot. The piece to which Neil's cable was fastened was an inch and a half in diameter, and looked strong enough to hold a team of horses, but in reality, inside the bark the wood was rotted so badly that the piece was more than half hollow. As Neil pressed with his fingers he could feel the shell of bark give inward.

NEIL'S EYES narrowed grimly as he brought his hand out in front of him again. Locking his fingers about the massive arms of the chair, he lunged forward with every ounce of strength in his lithe body. The weakened wood bowed slightly, then held. There was still enough strength in the piece to make it stubbornly resistant.

Neil rested a brief moment to recover his strength, then hurled himself forward again. For long, weary minutes his efforts brought little apparent result, but in a cold, deadly fury that refused to admit defeat, he savagely drove his aching muscles back to the attack again and again.

Yaagir's work upon Manuel's dangling body proceeded with relentless thoroughness. Jean and Kincaid kept their faces studiously averted, but Neil had to keep a wary eye on Yaagir to guard against the purple brain turning unexpectedly and catching him in his struggles for freedom.

Consequently, Neil had to watch the slow dissolution of Manuel's body in all its grisly details as the invisible rays ate on through muscles and nerves, then on through the bones of the skull into the exposed brain. Early in the process, Manuel died, but Yaagir worked steadily and methodically on.

Little by little, Neil's assault on the weakened wood began to give tangible results. The thick, hollow shell began gradually yielding and crumbling inward. Waiting until the hiss of Yaagir's ray projector was loudest, Neil contracted his straining muscles in a grim, final onslaught.

There was a smothered crackling as the rotten fibers started to give way, slowly at first, then in a final and complete break that came with a suddenness that nearly sent Neil tumbling forward before he caught himself.

He was free!

His first impulse was to hurl himself across the room in a headlong charge upon Yaagir and try to batter the grotesque, two-bodied figure down by the sheer savagery of his attack. But he swiftly fought that impulse back. The odds against any attempted attack of that kind would be a thousand to one. Not only was Yaagir enormously his superior in physical strength, but he also had the overwhelming advantage of the tube weapon there in his belt, where one of his four hands would be certain to snatch it out and get it into

action. Neil had already had sufficient evidence of the tube's deadly power in the shattering of the bodies of José and Manuel.

It was a chance that Neil dared not take. The responsibility resting upon his shoulders was far too great. His own life and the lives of his two companions were at stake, but beyond them was the threatened doom of an entire world. If he failed, Earth was fated to become a nightmare planet peopled only by human animals serving as dumb, insensate bearers for the conquering purple brains of Zaas.

In order to have any chance whatever against Yaagir, Neil had first to get hold of a weapon of some kind. He searched the big room with eyes desperately seeking anything that might be of use. He found nothing. The only faint possibility was Manuel's discarded machete, and it was so far away that the chances of reaching it were hopeless.

THEN NEIL'S attention was drawn back to Yaagir as the sibilant hiss of the rays died away into silence. Yaagir finished closing the white switch. His work upon Manuel's body was apparently completed. The thing that dangled from the cables was now nothing but a splintered skeleton from the shoulders up. Yaagir's method of disposing of what remained of the body was a spectacularly swift and thorough one.

His malformed hand sought the black lever on the barrel of the projector and pressed it down. The rays that flashed in a wide beam from the cone-shaped muzzle were visible this time as a flood of pulsating silver. There was a crackling hiss as the silver beam struck Manuel's body. For a fraction of

a second the body glowed like molten metal. Then, with a barely visible puff of bluish vapor, it vanished, blasted into nothingness. Yaagir snapped the black lever back up, and the silver rays ceased.

Neil's eyes gleamed as he saw the cataclysmic power of the force beam that had been unleashed by the movement of the small black lever. There was a weapon sufficiently powerful to overwhelm even Yaagir if Neil had any way of getting his hands on it. There would be no difficulty about manipulating the projector. Its operation was simplicity itself—merely swing the muzzle into line, then press the black lever down.

Yaagir turned one of the heads of his twin-bodied figure toward his prisoners. "The Earth woman is next," he announced. "But first I must get extra cables to fix her body in position for a complete recording."

Yaagir strode away from the apparatus, back toward the place where extra lengths of cable were coiled on the floor near the rear wall of the room. Hope surged madly through Neil's breast.

Here was the chance for which he had been longing. The projector was being left completely unguarded. It was barely twenty feet away from Neil's chair. One swift rush across that narrow intervening space would bring it within reach. It would then be the work of only a second to send the deadly mechanism spinning around on its wheeled legs and start the blast of its silver rays hurtling toward Yaagir.

With muscles tense and ready, Neil forced himself to wait until Yaagir had reached the end wall and was stooping down to get the cables. Then Neil flung himself out of his chair like a missile from a

catapult and sprinted for the projector with every ounce of speed in his body.

Yaagir whirled in startled surprise. One hand snatched the tube from his belt. There was a streak of fire as one of the blazing green pellets flashed across the room, but the shot was too hurried to be accurate. It missed Neil's racing figure by a foot, going on to explode with a tremendous roar against the wall far beyond.

Before Yaagir could fire again, Neil had reached the projector. Yaagir's tube was leveled, but he held his fire momentarily, apparently hesitating to risk a shot that might injure the projector's mechanism. With one swift spin on its wheeled base, Neil sent the projector whirling around.

Yaagir realized his danger then, and threw caution to the winds. His tube rippled continuous fire. As Neil snapped the black lever down, he had a flashing glimpse of a stream of the fiery pellets streaking toward him. Then the beam of the projector struck the pellets barely ten feet from the cone-shaped muzzle. There was a crashing explosion that sent Neil reeling back from the shattered and silenced projector.

Recovering himself, he stared with anxious eyes at the place where Yaagir had stood. That one brief flash of the projector's beam as it lanced on through the exploding pellets had failed to score a direct hit upon the purple brain itself, but it had struck close enough to wreak deadly damage.

THE TWIN-BODIED monstrosity that had been Yaagir's *garroh* was blasted completely out of existence. The only things remaining were the two shattered heads. Sev-

eral yards over to one side, where it had apparently been flung when the rays blasted the bodies from under it, was the brain, a writhing, purple thing whose sac was gashed in a score of gaping wounds.

A viscous, purple-black liquid flowed turgidly from the brain as it twisted in its death agony. One blunt protoplasmic arm suddenly jutted far out from the main mass, groping toward a small mechanism set in the floor beneath it. The blunt arm tip touched a weblike maze of fine wires. One of the strands glowed with creeping fire that swiftly began working its way through the maze toward a foot-long metal capsule in the center of the web.

Neil's heart leaped in sudden terror as he realized that the web-and-capsule mechanism must be the atomic bomb of which Yaagir had spoken. And in its dying struggle the purple brain had managed to set in operation the bomb's timing mechanism!

Frantically Neil leaped into action. He dared not risk tampering with the bomb itself in any effort to extinguish the burning wires. The only chance for himself and his two companions was to get into the open air before the explosion occurred.

He raced over and snatched up Manuel's discarded machete, then back to Kincaid and Jean. It was a matter of barely more than thirty seconds to chop through the wood and set them free. They raced frantically for the metal door at the head of the steps. Unbarring it, they fled on through into what proved to be the basement proper of the lodge.

Neil's last flashing look back over his shoulder as they left the laboratory room showed the purple brain

lying motionless and apparently dead in the middle of a slowly widening pool of purple-black. Then Neil fled on after his companions as they scrambled up the basement steps and out into the open.

They raced on down the slope, and had just reached the stone fence when the explosion came. There was a colossal burst of green flame that seemed to split the very heavens, then a terrific blast that sent them reeling to the ground. Dazed

and bruised from flying débris, they struggled to their feet again and looked back up the slope.

Where the lodge had once stood on the mound's summit was now only a jagged, smoking crater. The gold-and-white laboratory, with all its mechanisms of an alien science, was blown to dust.

And with it had been blasted into oblivion every trace of the monstrous glowing thing that had been Yaagir, purple brain of Zaas.

Controversy?

Argument?

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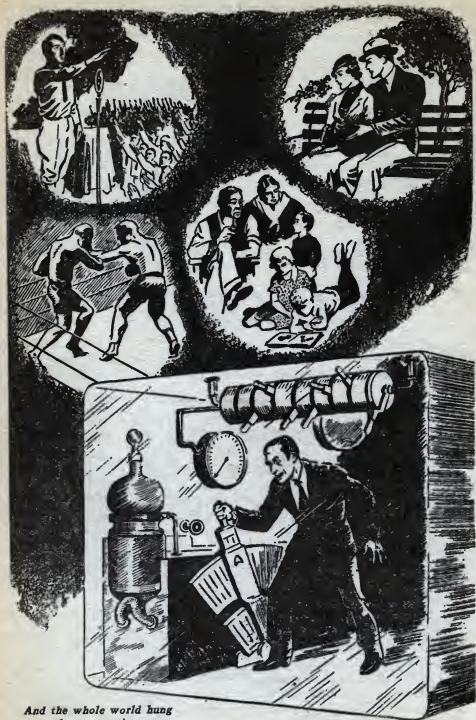
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ASTOUNDING STORIES



*And the whole world hung
on that one action—*

*NAT SCHACHNER Challenges Debate
in the most provoking story up till now*

Ancestral Voices

THE YEAR of grace 1935!

A dull year, a comfortable year! Nothing much happened. The depression was over; people worked steadily at their jobs and forgot that they had ever starved; Roosevelt was still President of the United States; Hitler was firmly ensconced in Germany; France talked of security; Japan continued to defend itself against China by swallowing a few more provinces; Russia was about to commence on the third Five Year Plan, to be completed in two years; and, oh, yes—Cuba was still in revolution.

In short, a normal, workaday world in which the social sciences were once more relegated to the obscure utterances of long-haired professors, and the average man passed hurriedly over columns of politics and the international situation to pore intently on the chances of the Yankees over the Athletics, and the inch-by-inch measurements of the Hebraic challenger, Max Bernstein, juxtaposed against those of the Nordic heavyweight champion of the world, the mighty Hans Schilling himself.

What could possibly happen in a world of such even-going pace, except casual normalities, like:

James Mann looked up feebly at the terrifying shadow of his boss. The boss was Spanish, darkly predatory.

"Look here, Mann," he was say-

ing. "Your accounts are out two cents again."

"I—I can't understand it, sir."

"I'm not asking you to understand it," the boss said sharply. "I want accuracy, loyalty. The next time you make a mistake, out you go—fired. How much am I paying you now?"

"Fifteen a week, sir."

"The minimum, hey? You're not worth that much. Five would be more like it."

Now James Mann, bookkeeper and near-sighted bachelor, prided himself on one thing in his meek, rabbitlike existence. That was the fact that he was superior to all foreigners by virtue of his ancestor having signed the Domesday Book in illiterate, highly illegible Anglo-Saxon.

Something burst within him now, some long-underlaid streak of reckless insanity. He rose from his desk to a full five feet four; thrust a violently wagging forefinger under his boss's nose.

"You—you filthy foreigner!" he half screamed. "Keep your filthy job! My ancestors——"

Now consider:

Herr Hellwig, Dictator of Mid-europa, struck a characteristic pose. At once a hundred thousand Blue Shirts extended their hands and shouted in unison: "*Heil Hellwig!*" The roar of it shook the earth with the thunder of far-marching armies.

The bristly little mustache of his sallow face fairly quivered. His mouth opened; he spoke:

"The future of the world belongs to the Mideuropans! The other nations know it; they are panic-stricken! It was treachery, base treachery, that won for them before! Down with the Jews and Communists!"

"Down with the Jews and Communists!" thundered the antiphonal response.

Herr Hellwig was gratified.

"We have eliminated the scoundrels!" he orated. "We are a pure race of Nordics! Vercingetorix was our ancestor! We shall, we must prevail! Blah—blah—blah!"

Or if you prefer the purlieus of Boston Brahmsism:

Georgiana Cabot looked with marked distaste at her tall, iron-gray husband. He was distinguished-looking, was Henry Cabot; especially now, as he put the last finishing touch to his dress tie and hummed before the mirror a slow, seductive waltz. She herself was faded, prim, and highly rouged.

"I don't mind so much your low-bred taste in having an affair with a chorus girl," she observed coldly; "but at least you could have the decency not to let all Boston in on the sordid details. Remember, you are a Cabot, and I——"

"Yes, yes, I know," the man said wearily. The light had gone out of his face. "You are an Adams, and a Daughter of the American Revolution. That's just the trouble. If you could forget those damning facts for a moment, perhaps there would have been no chorus girl."

"Why, Henry, it is outrageous of you——"

And so the quarrel started.

Of course, there are pleasanter scenes. Take this one for example:

The park in late springtime. A girl sat on the bench; overhead a dogwood spread its waxen blooms. The girl was beautiful, with a certain warm, olive-tinted Latinity to her. She palpably expected some one. Her eager eyes raked the winding path both ways; she glanced at her wrist watch, and the worried lines on her forehead deepened. She bit her lip.

There was the sound of crunching, hurried footsteps. She looked up, saw a very blond young man half running. Her face lit up with happiness. The worried lines disappeared.

"Paul!"

"Emily!"

The discreet squirrels looked the other way for the next minute or so. When they did glance around again, the girl was patting her hair back into place, and the young man was explaining:

"I just had it out with the mater."

The girl turned swiftly.

"Paul! You told her?"

He nodded gloomily.

"Yes."

"And——"

"Damn it, all!" he exclaimed irrelevantly. "Suppose my forbear was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. He might just as well have been hung, the old pirate!"

"And my father came over in the steerage. I understand."

The young man said fiercely:

"I won't give you up."

In spite of the red-faced cop standing stolidly not a hundred feet away; in spite of bright-eyed, chattering sparrows unversed in the delicacies of squirrels, his arms went out for her. She moved blindly toward him——

Now this is really very unusual; not only for 1935, year of normalities; it would have been passing strange even in 1933, when the world was stirring and quickening with the yeast of its motion. In the first place, it involves science, and science is always unusual. But listen for yourself:

THE LABORATORY was filled with precision instruments, such as a hundred other physical laboratories could have duplicated. There was something else, however, and this was truly unique. Emmet Pennypacker had made it after three years of unremitting toil, and now it was finished. Any number of internationally known scientists, if they had known, as of course they didn't, could have told you that if an invention took Pennypacker that long to complete, it must be a world beater.

Pennypacker admitted it himself; there was no false modesty about the man! Even Sam Corey, his assistant, had to admit it, though he resented many other things in his chief. For it must be confessed that the scientist's personality was not particularly pleasing. He was ruthless, unscrupulous, avid for personal aggrandisement and glory. He swallowed the unsung, unknown labors of talented assistants like Sam Corey without so much as an acknowledgement; he tore the professional reputations of his colleagues to pieces if only it meant another column of praise in the press.

Now, as he stood, arms akimbo, in the laboratory, staring at his last and most marvelous invention, Pennypacker's lips were wreathed in a thin smile of triumph. Sam Corey watched the yellowish, high-cheeked features, the strong, beak-like nose, the single line of the

thick, black eyebrow, with a bit of distaste. Pennypacker's fingers twitched. Lord! Was he going to repeat that idiotic, habitual gesture? There it came. The right hand moved unconsciously up, twisted around the back of the neck, and scratched the tip of the longish nose. A contortionist's trick; one that Sam Corey couldn't have duplicated if he tried.

Pennypacker stepped back.

"It's the supreme product of human powers," he said. "My name will resound through the ages as the greatest man of all time. Look at it, Sam! Look at it!"

Sam smiled wryly. Not a word about his share in the planning and making of the machine. As a matter of fact, the whole idea and construction had really been his. But he only said: "Absolutely, Mr. Pennypacker," and turned to stare at the machine as though it were the first time, and not the thousandth.

It was well worth staring at. Resting on a movable platform was a large square box, tall enough and wide enough to accommodate several men, as well as a cluster of shiny machinery, tubes, numerous gadgets and controls. What was peculiar about the box was the material of which it was made. A transparent, metalliclike substance, harder and less clear than glass, and shimmering in a sort of ecstatic dance as though its component atoms were afflicted with a stuttering St. Vitus.

"A beautiful thing," acknowledged Sam. "I hope it works."

"Works?" Pennypacker echoed, as though he had not heard aright. "Of course it works. This time machine is absolutely foolproof. Works! Ha!" He snorted and glared. "Even you could work it!"

"Of course," said Sam with subtle

meaning. "But it's dangerous business, meddling with the past. What's done is done. 'The moving finger writes, and, having writ, moves on——' You know the rest. We try to introduce an anachronistic element into the past, and the consequences may be incalculable. Now, if you were traveling into the future, I'd be glad to——"

"Bunk! Stuff and nonsense!" interrupted the older man rudely. "Don't quote poetry at me, Corey, to bolster up your cowardice. I'm going into the past for that very reason; it's more difficult. The glory will be greater, and—the world will believe more readily. I can bring back proof; the future is a myth; they'll accuse me of inventing it."

That was it, thought Sam bitterly. Thinking only of the effect upon an admiring world instead of the true scientific spirit. The past was dead; nothing to be learned there; but the future——

Aloud he said: "Curious element, *vibratium*. Without its strange property of reversing itself or speeding up in time, the machine could never have been made."

"Y-e-es," Pennypacker assented grudgingly, as though Corey were setting undue limits to his powers. Then: "But come; get everything ready. I am anxious to start."

Sam walked through a slide door into the machine. He adjusted the shining, shimmering controls, made certain tests, carefully ascertained that the automatic reverse was set for three hours, to insure the return of the machine within that time limit.

"All set, sir," he reported.

Pennypacker gulped down a colloid solution of the new element to impregnate his body with its peculiar qualities. Then he walked

steadily into the machine. The man was brave in his fashion.

"I'd like to go with you, sir," said Corey.

Pennypacker stopped, swung on his heel, glared through the open door at his assistant.

"No!" he literally barked. "This first trip is mine, mine alone! You wait here and watch."

The slide slid noiselessly into position. Corey saw a strangely distorted figure press a button inside.

"Good-by," he shouted viciously, sure that he could not be heard. "I hope you meet your great ape of a great-great-grandfather. He'll commit suicide when he sees what he created!"

The time machine cleared magically a moment, then clouded into milky opaqueness. The sharp outlines blurred and faded until there was only a gray mist; then nothingness. The machine had started on its tremendous journey back into time!

Sam Corey cursed to relieve his feelings; then, because he was above all a scientist, sat down to await the ending of the three-hour interval, every nerve taut for the slightest interruption to the great experiment.

MRS. MURPHY sat dry-eyed, listening to her lord and master. When he paused for a particularly strangling hiccup, she said:

"You're drunk!"

Her three children, ranging from Bridget, seven, to Tim, three, the cause of all the commotion, hung on to her ample skirts, whimpering, frightened.

Mr. Murphy sank into a rickety wooden chair and wiped his slobbering mouth with the back of an uncertain hand.

"Drunk, 'm I?" he muttered, glow-

ering. "Well, maybe I am! An' why shouldn't I be, Mrs. Murphy?" he roared suddenly. Tim began to cry loudly.

Mr. Murphy rose unsteadily to his feet, glared at his youngest offspring with bloodshot eyes.

"Look at 'm!" he shouted. "Black's ace o' spades! A bloody Eytalian, thass wha' he is. Ain't no Murphy 'bout 'm; like Bridget an' Michael, the darlints. You, Mrs. Murphy"—he pointed a wavering, hairy finger—"been—been unfaithful!"

He sank back into the chair, bowed his head on the table, and keened beerily.

Mrs. Murphy shrugged her shoulders with a Mona Lisa smile. She was used to these scenes; they occurred every time Mr. Murphy came home more than ordinarily drunk.

Tim, the youngest, looked so un-Irish.

In Cuba there was the usual revolution. Gonzales, the president pro tem, was about to be shot by order of Merrido, the president-to-be. The firing squad were sighting down their rifles, waiting for the signal.

In England a newly made member of Parliament was haranguing a bored House of Commons; in Sicily a peasant was lustily treading out the dark-red juice of the grapes with bare, muscular feet, singing the "Drinking Song" from *Otello* to the accompaniment of his downward jumps. An orthodox Jewish rabbi was conning his prayer book. An OGPU officer stalked into a Russian factory to arrest a sabotaging counter-revolutionist. A Turkish soldier waited at the barred gate to the harem.

All quiet on the western, southern, eastern, and northern fronts!

No! I almost forgot. There was one event stirring in this year of 1935 that had the world by the ears. America certainly was all agog; every one discussed it, argued with all the factual discrepancies and rancor of experts. Broadcasting networks were hooked up as never before; announcers were on their toes; reporters pounded furiously on typewriters; cable and wireless companies reaped a harvest; and Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, waited for the tremendous dénouement. Mideuropa was wild with Hellwigish enthusiasm, of course.

The mammoth, gigantic, overadvertised conflict of all time was in progress. Max Bernstein, Semitic challenger, against Hans Schilling, champion, for the heavyweight championship of the world!

The Garden was black with humanity; tier on tier of them, crammed into every available inch of space, clinging to the rafters, solidly packed into the aisles, hysterical, limp, raucous, imploring, yelling for blood.

It had been a great fight so far. The great bulk of the champion, with his ponderous reach and bone-crushing, sledge-hammer blows; the lighter, shorter challenger, with his superior speed and agility. Both were battered out of all semblance to humanity; both were groggy and game.

The beginning of the tenth round of a fifteen-round so-called boxing contest. The bell clanged harshly, and its last notes were lost in the roar of the crowd. Everybody was on his feet, struggling for a better view, cursing his neighbor, collars sweaty and torn, chanting:

"Knock 'im out! Kill 'im! Get the big bum! In the breadbasket! Put the big palooka out!"

In short, all the cultured give-

and-take of a fully developed civilization.

The two gladiators were in the center of the ring; the beating lights glistened from sweaty, muscular bodies.

Schilling led off with a smashing right. Bernstein ducked slightly, and the blow passed over his shoulder. He countered with a short jab to the chin. The champion's head rocked back. The crowd yelled. Schilling shook his head, swung his left. It caught Bernstein in the side; staggered him. To save himself, he clinched. There was a rapid hammering of blows on reddened ribs; then the referee sprang in.

"Break!" he shouted.

The fighters parted. Schilling's lips went back from split mouth in a snarl.

"Yah!" he taunted. "Kike! Back to the ghetto!"

Bernstein went dead-white, then the dark blood swarmed over head and shoulders. He swung suddenly from the floor. Every ounce of power was in that blow. It smashed square into Schilling's nose.

The giant rocked on his heels, went down. The referee sprang over him; Bernstein backed into a corner. The Garden was wild with sound.

"One—two—three—four——"

The referee could hardly be heard in the tumult.

"Five—six—seven—eight——" he called.

Somewhere in the dim, bewildered brain of the fallen champion sounds penetrated. He heaved, staggered slowly to his feet on the last count, grinned foolishly, and fumbled for his opponent.

Bernstein drew his right calmly back; measured the befuddled giant for the final killing blow. The

glove flicked forward; the roar of the mob was indescribable——

EMMET PENNYPACKER seemed suspended in the void; a void of sullen blankness in which there was neither day nor night, form nor shape, machine nor man. How long this state of not being lasted, he never was able to tell. Time itself had no sense or meaning.

Then awareness came; awareness of a lightening in a materialized universe; a sense of solidity to body and a pressure against unyielding floor. The time machine was slowing down.

Pennypacker's thoughts went round and round in whirligig fashion. "Don't know where stop—stop where can—calculations impossible—impossible know—maybe no world—out in space—afraid——"

His senses cleared; he gaped foolishly around. The machine was solid about him; the walls were milky-white. That meant he was almost at the end of his journey. He felt uneasily for the gun in his pocket. It was still there, fully loaded, but it gave him no comfort. He regretted now that he had wanted all the glory for himself; Sam Corey would have been a tower of strength.

The milkiess was clearing. He strained his eyes anxiously. What was outside; what strange monsters and steamy swamps? Perhaps the earth was a molten mass; perhaps it had whirled backward from under him, and he was suspended horribly in space.

The *vibratium* walls shimmered into translucency; the atoms were approaching normal speeds. A tiny jar, and vision was established. The machine had come to a halt.

Emmet Pennypacker stared, groaned, and cowered back.

The machine was resting against the solid stone of a wall. It was the edge of a great square in the heart of an ancient city; Roman, by the massiveness and simplicity of its architecture. But that was not what had elicited the groan from Pennypacker.

The city was in flames; the sparks flew upward on surges of dense black smoke; walls tottered and fell in ruining destruction. Even that did not represent the full horror of it. For the great square was a shambles; the bodies of dead and dying lay in great, sprawling heaps. Through the *vibratium* walls came shouts and screams and shrieks and the crash of collapsing houses.

Figures rushed wildly across the square, like puppets jerked by invisible strings. Men in the characteristic Roman armor ran headlong, unarmed, the doom of approaching death on set lips and darkened eyes. Women, old, young, granddames, maidens, fled helter-skelter, stumbling over the dead, hair streaming wildly, shrieking with insane intensity.

There were other men; strange, savage-looking barbarians; swart, yellowish, misshapen, and squatly powerful. Some ran with flaming torches, thrust them into open doorways, and ran on, leaving flame and smoke to burst out behind in gushing blasts. Others staggered under heaped piles of loot, bedecked in grisly fashion with pendant ornaments and mincing bracelets; others shouted and sang in wild, vinous accents, and others ran methodically and with deadly precision. Their short swords rose and fell—and came up dripping, bloody. A fleeing Roman soldier went crashing, cloven to the nape; an ancient bel-dame shrieked and stopped in bloody gurgles.

Pennypacker thus found himself in the Roman city of Aquileia, in the year 452 A. D., at the very moment that Attila's Huns had broken through the city walls!

Pennypacker screamed once and dashed for the controls. He did not want to remain in this terrible place! He did not want to travel in time any more! If only he could get back to safe-and-sane 1935, he would destroy the time machine; he would—

He groaned and cowered away. He had forgotten. The controls were locked on automatic reverse; he must wait, wait three hours. Three hours! Eternity in this scene of carnage and horror! He would go mad! He would be discovered and killed!

A piercing screech filtered through the glassy wall. He raised his head from his hands. A girl was running straight across the square, running swiftly over debris and the dead, her long white garment whipping backward with the wind of her flight. Her tawny hair was disordered; her eyes were wide with fear. Behind her clattered a Hun—squat, powerful, hairy, his thick brow a single straight gash, his nose curved like a vulture's, his skin tough and yellow.

There was brutal, avid desire in his slanted eyes, and he was gaining on the fleeing girl. Pennypacker jerked forward with an oath. The girl was running straight for the time machine; her eyes flared into hope.

Pennypacker yelled insanely, beat upon the locked, immobile controls. He was discovered! He would be killed! He did not want to die in this long-dead past.

The girl had reached the deceptive glass of the machine, was hammering with small, tender fists

against the solid wall. The Hun leaped the intervening distance, caught at her shoulder. The hope in her eyes gave way to horror. She screamed in last despair as the hairy arms encircled her, swung her like a sack of meal over a squat, powerful shoulder.

The gaze of the Hun and that of the man of A. D. 1935 met. The Hun grinned brutally and turned to carry off his prey. The girl's hand fluttered feebly to Pennypacker in a final imploring gesture.

Something cracked within the man. Not knowing what he did, swearing horribly, his hand fought the slide control. The door sprang open. Still unknowing, the gun somehow in his hand, he raised it, shot. The bullet tore at the barbarian's leg. It sagged; he sat grotesquely down.

Pennypacker ran out of the machine to help the girl, but she forestalled him. She had flung clear; was up on her feet, and, without looking backward, without so much as a "Thank you," fled like a startled animal straight for the nearest building and disappeared into the portico.

Pennypacker stared after her in disgust, and even as he stared, a party of Huns dashed into the very structure the girl had thought to hide in. Pennypacker shrugged his shoulders.

"Serves her damn right," he muttered, and turned to go back into the machine.

Pennypacker did not know it, but he had interfered with the course of history and unwittingly sealed his own fate. The girl would have been his many-times-removed great-grandmother! Thus time revenges itself on those who pry into its secrets.

There was another surprise wait-

ing for him. The barbarian Hun had managed to drag himself with his shattered leg into the machine, and as Pennypacker, still dazed, entered, he felt himself caught in a grip of iron.

He cried out with the pain of it, and struggled to free himself, but it was like the futile buzzing of a fly enmeshed in a spider's web. The hold on his leg gripped all the tighter. Pennypacker ceased struggling, and caught hold of a jutting control. The barbarian, because of his wounded leg, could not rise or draw him nearer for the finishing blow; and Pennypacker, holding grimly onto the control, could not free his captured leg.

A straining, heaving tug of war, and then, as if by mutual consent, both ceased pulling, to remain in a sort of status quo. Their eyes turned and met.

Pennypacker was so shocked that he almost let go his hold. The features of the Hun—the straight black brow, the yellowish tinge, the nose—they all seemed strangely familiar, as though they were a caricature of some one he knew. The Hun, too, seemed great puzzled. He stared up with dark, savage eyes; the straight brow furrowed with unaccustomed thought.

Then, almost simultaneously, their free hands stole around the nape of their necks and scratched gently at the longish noses.

The characteristic, unconscious gesture of Pennypacker that used to infuriate Sam Corey most unreasonably. Duplicated, back in time, at the sack of Aquileia, by a Hun, an unspeakable savage, a deformed creature stemming from the Asiatic steppes, following the scourge of God, scum of humanity!

Pennypacker let go his hold in the surprise of it, dropped to the

floor within easy reach of the fierce barbarian. But the Hun, though still gripping his leg, made no other move. He sat there, his wounded leg stiff in front of him, staring at the modern man.

He opened his mouth; thick, barbarous speech spewed forth. Pennypacker, beyond fear, shook his head and said nothing. The Hun tried again. This time more haltingly, with frequent stops as he fumbled for the words and with mutilated intonations. But Pennypacker, who was somewhat of a scholar, caught the drift. The Hun was addressing him in ancient Latin.

"You—do that," the savage warrior mouthed. "That old trick—my family. Father do it; great father; way back. Who you? Were you from? How——"

Pennypacker stared down at the distorted, bestial features in front of him. He shuddered. That strange familiarity—it resolved itself into a weird caricature of his own face. That trick gesture—his own father and great-grandfather, according to tradition, had been addicted to it.

It was impossible; a nightmare come to plague him!

He winked his eyes violently; hoping to awake, to find himself in bed back in 1935. But no; the scenes of slaughter and lust continued around him; the ancestral Hun gave him back feature for feature; the grip on his leg had not relaxed.

Then he went mad; stark, raving mad.

"Go away," he shrieked, "vision out of hell! I disown you, I defy you. You never fathered me! I come of Norman stock! You devil, you!"

He struck futilely at the grinning

visage, a stinging, glancing blow. The Hun's puzzled grin gave way to a scowl of utter ferocity. The beast, the Oriental savage, came to the fore with a rush. He had been struck, insulted. It called for blood, the warm, satisfying gush of blood from gaping wounds. The terrifying battle cry of the Huns ripped out of his throat, filled the machine with its ululations.

"Ula-ula-ula-loo-loo!"

His right arm whipped around, caught Pennypacker by the throat. The scientist felt himself strangling; his hands plucked unavailingly at the steely grip; red, hate-filled eyes stared into his; hot breath was on his cheek.

He tried to cry out, and could not. The bands were constricting. Everything was a red haze. His arms dropped limply. The right hand contacted with something hard. A last gush of consciousness. That must be the gun. His fingers clutched, raised it.

Something told him he must not fire; the consequences would be infinitely incalculable; but he was dying, anyway. There was no mercy in the Hun. The red haze deepened. His hand moved in reflex action. The muzzle tilted; the finger compressed. There was a shattering roar; the barbarian shook violently, stared in hurt surprise, and slowly collapsed.

Pennypacker felt the death-dealing grip loosen, felt rather than saw the sprawl of the Hun. Then—suddenly—darkness, vague, illimitable——

Men were running to the machine with great shouts, Huns with weapons in their hands. The *vibratium* walls cleared, turned milky-white, and faded. The automatic reverse had gone into action. The three-hour limit was up!

JAMES MANN, bookkeeper, shouted under the nose of his astounded boss: "My ancestors——"

He staggered, held himself painfully. Then——

The boss said: "My God!" and fell back into a chair.

He rubbed his eyes, tried to control the trembling of his limbs.

He stared around the office with bloodshot, haggard eyes.

It was empty!

James Mann had vanished, as though he had never been!

That was it—as though he had never been.

The boss raised himself, fighting back insanity. He ran around, peering under desks and chairs. No use!

"Mann!" he cried, his voice a semishriek. "Come back! I know it's a joke! You're hiding some place. I'll raise your salary! I'll do anything!"

No answer, for the very good reason that James Mann never existed on this earth.

"Oh, my God!" mouthed the boss, and fell on the floor in a fit. There they found him, his other employees. Shrieking and gibbering—mad!

Herr Hellwig was in splendid fettle. He played upon the hundred thousand Blue Shirts as though they were a many-stopped organ.

"Blah! Blah! War!" he shouted. "War against the enemy! I call on Vercingetorix, our ancestor; Odin, Thor, all the gods of Valhalla——"

The Blue Shirts flamed, upended sun-bright swords, crashed out:

"War! Heil Hellwig!"

And stopped as though paralyzed.

A hundred thousand stared, a hundred thousand moaned, a hundred thousand—no—*ninety thousand*, broke into epic, panic flight.

Their leader, calling on his ancestors, on his ancient gods, had

vanished, gone as though he had never been.

The gods had revenged themselves!

With Henry Cabot it was much simpler.

His wife choked on a fish-wife epithet, most unbecoming in an Adams and a Daughter of the American Revolution, and evaporated.

Henry Cabot rubbed his eyes unbelievably, said something under his breath. He was in truth a Cabot, a Brahmin of Brahmins, schooled to self-repression, so he did not faint nor call wildly for help.

He took a step forward, stopped. No question about it; his wife had evaporated. He made a move toward the telephone to call the police, paused again, shrugged his shoulders. They would not believe him, of course.

A slow smile broke over his aristocratic countenance. He commenced humming the interrupted waltz, adjusted his necktie, went out to meet his chorus girl.

Emily closed her eyes, nestled forward for Paul's strong arms, and fell half across the bench. She picked herself up, opened her eyes, and screamed.

She was alone!

The red-faced policeman came on a lumbering run, swinging his stick. One look at the hysterical, shrieking girl and he blew a shrill blast on his whistle. A brother officer came racing; a crowd gathered with the facility that all New York crowds possess.

"Call the ambulance, Pete," No. 1 said. "Bellevue; psychopathic ward. It's a pity; she's got good looks."

He turned savagely on the crowd.

"G'wan, scram! What d'ye think this is—a circus?"

Max Bernstein let loose the killing blow, straight for the unprotected, sagging jaw of Hans Schilling, the champion. Within seconds there would be a new champion.

The Garden was bedlam. Expensive straws showered unnoticed on straining, blood-lustful humanity. The climax to the battle of the century. The announcers danced insanely before the microphones; their voices cracked and hoarse.

"Folks, it's coming, on its way! It's connecting! Max Bernstein's fist— Hold on! Wh-what's that? Where am I? Where are we? Oh, my God!"

The microphones went dead, forgotten. In a million homes, ears, thirstily waiting for the description of the final blow, strained in vain. Even the roar of the crowd went mute. Then—confused sounds, terrified, wailing, like animals in mortal agony.

Home-sitting fight fans shuddered, turned off their radios; rushed to phone broadcasting stations, clamoring for information, clogging all wires.

Hans Schilling, Nordic champion, and Max Bernstein, Jewish challenger, had both puffed out like wisps of smoke in mid-blow, in the very center of the ring, under the fierce, beating glare of the floodlights!

SAM COREY waited alertly in the laboratory, his eyes glued to the split-second clock; the platform where the time machine should reappear.

Three hours! Eternity!

Never did seconds drag more interminably. The machine had vanished according to schedule; the first half of the experiment was a success. Somewhere in time, in the dim past ages, the machine rested;

somewhere in time, Emmet Pennypacker existed, no longer an entity in the year 1935.

What was happening to him? Sam Corey tried to visualize; could not concentrate; gave it up, and waited, every sense taut on the dragging clock.

A quarter to three! Pennypacker had started at twelve. Ten minutes, five minutes, one minute, fifteen seconds. Sam Corey sprang up. One second!

A vague opalescence, a shadowy mist gathering; a milky, coherent cloud, and the familiar shimmer of the *vibratium*-built time machine. It had returned on the dot, obedient to the automatic reverse.

Sam allowed his scientific feelings to overcome him. He gave an exultant whoop, dashed forward to the machine. He stopped, cried out in horror, jumped in through the open slide door, knelt at the motionless body within.

It was minutes before he arose. When he did, he was a strangely aged, stooped man. Gone was the zest of youth, never to return. His lips were grim, taut; his eyes hard. Very deliberately he dragged the body out into the laboratory; very deliberately he searched around until he found what he wanted. It was a sledge hammer. Methodically he smashed into smithereens the time machine, the greatest invention that man had ever conceived.

At last, satisfied that no one part was intact or recognizable, he went to the phone and called the police—and the reporters.

It was a tragedy of colossal dimensions that struck an astounded world. A holocaust that left its impact on future generations, making it impossible for any scientist to dare meddle again with time.

Fifty thousand men, women and children vanished that fatal day; fifty thousand human beings of every race and clime; in savage Africa, in far-off Australia, in teeming China, in blue-eyed northern Europe, in dark-haired southern Europe, in the vast stretches of America, the melting pot of all races.

Gone, vanished, disappeared without a trace, as though they had never been!

That was it; they had never been, explained Sam Corey to the horde of clamoring reporters, while a bewildered world, mourning lost dear ones, surfeited with supernatural tragedy, groped for a coherent answer.

"You see," said Sam, after the awe-stricken men had thrown vain glances at the smashed machine, stared with sharp intakes of breath at the thing on the floor, "you can't play around with time. I warned Pennypacker, but he wouldn't listen. I helped him build the machine—it was his idea completely," he added hastily. He did not want the credit that rightly was his. The execrations of mankind would immortally follow the creator.

"To go into the future," resumed Sam, "yes, that might be possible; though even then there might be trouble. It's a delicate business. But into the past! The past is done, completely. The tale is told. 'The moving finger writes, and, having writ, moves on—' You know the rest."

The reporters looked at each other, nodded wisely, and scribbled. A good line; make note to look it up, where it came from, back at the copy desk.

Sam crossed his legs. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

"You go back into the past," he

said, "and what happens? You intrude into a state of affairs that's already worked out; cause and effect. Your mere presence is sufficient to set up disturbances that should never have existed."

A reporter raised his head, looked with avid, fascinated eyes at the thing on the floor.

"But that," he muttered. "What is it?"

"I'm coming to that," Sam said deliberately. "Pennypacker did more than intrude. He killed a man; a man who had lived and bred children, and who in turn bred children, and so on *ad infinitum*. Reason mathematically; figure the number of generations; the spread of offspring. Fifty thousand is conservative; I'm surprised half the world didn't go!

"The man died by an act that should never have happened. The consequences are simple. The children he must have had after his untimely decease, and I use the word *untimely* advisedly, were therefore never born. Accordingly, all his descendants whom we supposed alive to-day never were. They were illusions, figments of our imagination, and necessarily vanished into nothingness the moment their putative ancestor shuffled off his mortal coil."

"But this thing," persisted the stubborn reporter. "And where is Pennypacker?"

For the first time Sam Corey smiled. Years of bitterness under the selfish egotism of Pennypacker were now bearing pleasant fruit.

He got up, went to the body.

"This," he repeated. "Look at it; it's a Hun of Attila's time. Read Gibbon's description. Note something further. It's a caricature, I grant you, but a painfully accurate caricature of Emmet Pennypacker,

the eminent scientist. This Hun was Pennypacker's direct progenitor. Pennypacker killed his own father, so to speak, and therefore never existed. Pennypacker, gentlemen, was a myth!"

HERE THIS veracious chronicle should end, but there is just one further incident to be told, if only to season unmitigated horror with a little spice of grim humor—if only to point a moral.

Mrs. Murphy was waiting for the return of her lord and master; frightened, hard, and faintly triumphant, in bewildering succession. Little Tim clung to her ample Sunday-going black dress, whimpering.

It was evening. The papers were out already, screaming headlines about the world-wide tragedy and the incredible explanation. She hushed poor Tim with absent, stroking fingers, and waited.

Mr. Murphy walked elaborately through the door, more drunk than usual. The holocaust had caught him at work—riyeting; a pal had vanished from his side. That meant drinks to drown the memory; more drinks to vanquish thought.

He stared blearily at Mrs. Murphy, at poor, dark-haired Tim. Ancient suspicions awaked in him, as they were wont to do on such occasions.

"Look at 'm!" he shouted. "Black's ace o' spades! A bloody Eytalian, thass wha' he is! Ain't no Murphy 'bout 'm, like Bridget an' Michael. Say—whe-where's my children?"

Mrs. Murphy rose to magnificent heights. Her voice was filled with grief, with strange triumph.

"You—drunken—fool!" she said. "A lot you know! Bridget and Michael were *not* your children! They've been took. Tim is your only child. You—fool!"

She sat down, panting from the effort, a little frightened now, hugging Tim close against the inevitable outburst.

Mr. Murphy looked at her with cold-sober eyes. The drink was completely out of him.

He pushed a hairy hand across his brow.

"They've been took," he muttered. "Took!"

He looked across at Tim, and the child flinched away.

"Tim—only one left!"

Mr. Murphy's brow cleared.

"O' course!" he roared, and banged his fist on the table. "I knew it all along! Tim's a real Murphy; there's black Irish in 'm."

He gestured splendidly.

"Shure, Mrs. Murphy, ye needn't be thinkin' ye've pulled the wool over my eyes all these years, you ould darlint!"

Stratosphere Planes

STRATOSPHERE planes have actually been built, one by a French concern and one by the German Junkers airplane factory. Results of their test flights, if any have been made, have been kept secret. The secrecy is believed to be due to the imminent possibility of quick round-the-world flights and transoceanic flights of a few moments' duration, the two companies jealously guarding details from each other in a race each to be the first with a machine that will fly where there is no atmosphere to set limitations on speed.

Last Sacrifice

*Into the night he rode—not knowing
why! And found himself among
unbelievable things——*

WHEN I LOOK BACK, it appears that the first inkling I had of the impending incident with its ghastly consequences was when I walked out on my porch at sunset.

The sky was flaming in the last red rays of day; great billowing clouds, vermilion in the sunlight and somber purple in the shadows, were piled against the horizon. That stillness peculiar to the tropics during the few minutes before daylight and darkness had fallen on the sleepy town of Vallieres.

Set high on its rugged mountain, the village with its white masonry chapel seemed almost to touch the sky. A cool breeze always crept up the valley at this hour, and on its wings it carried the sound of muttered prayers from the chapel across the Place d'Armes from me. The mumbling of the sparse black congregation on this particular evening struck a responsive chord deep within me.

My eyes wandered over the graceful lines of the old chapel. The building had been erected over a hundred years ago by some doughty French priest who had crossed the sea to this island of Haiti and had braved his way to the top of this lofty mountain, and I could not help but admire his artistic ability when I studied the nice scaling of the curved doorway. But I sighed when I contemplated the angular structure that was my own house and had been built for me a few months pre-

viously by the department of public works.

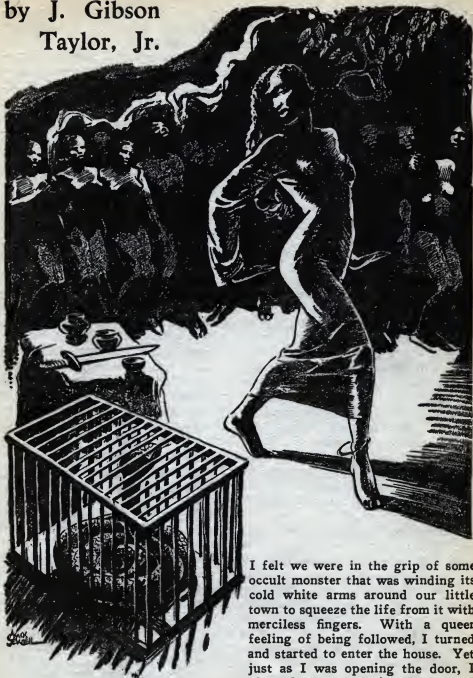
Unconsciously, my glance traveled to the graveyard. The white marble headstones, I knew, marked the resting places of the Frenchmen who had been buried prior to the revolution in 1791, but the more numerous and heavy masonry sarcophagi covered the remains of the black inhabitants that had died since then. Each sarcophagus bore niches in the four sides where candles could be burned on the Eve of Toussaint, and the newer ones were laden with bottles of rum and offerings of fruit that had been placed there by living relatives.

It was strange how paradoxically the natives of Haiti believed. They buried their dead with the blessings of the Catholic church, yet constructed the sarcophagi and left presents of food according to voodoo dictates. I had heard uncanny tales of the voodoo orgies held high in the mountain fastnesses around Vallieres, but I smiled at them. These paltry offerings of food to the departed, the *ouanga* charms that were sold in the open market, were the only manifestations that I had seen.

The clouds were rapidly darkening. In piles of awesome height they advanced on the town, blotting out the last rays of the sun and speeding the dusk of night. In a few moments they had enshrouded Vallieres.

The sight made me apprehensive.

by J. Gibson
Taylor, Jr.



*Then the dance of terror
and of death began——*

I felt we were in the grip of some occult monster that was winding its cold white arms around our little town to squeeze the life from it with merciless fingers. With a queer feeling of being followed, I turned and started to enter the house. Yet just as I was opening the door, I glanced around again, then stood there rooted.

My glance had gone to the little graveyard that was beside the

chapel. And in that moment, the sun, through a tiny rift in the cloud formation, sent a thin ray of light down to a sarcophagus that was on a slight rise in the center of the cemetery.

I had already examined the graves there, and was able to tell instantly that the one singled out by the finger of blood-red sunlight was the resting place of a rather famous general who had met an untimely end here on this mountain not quite fifty years ago. Perhaps that sunbeam did not actually confine itself to the one grave; perhaps because the general's was a little higher than the others, I saw only that one; but at any rate, for a few moments I was amazed to see the one grave touched by a living red glow.

But I am not a superstitious sort of man, and after a second or two during which I felt mystified at the odd occurrence, I went into the house.

After dinner that night, the house-boy brought me the key to the cook-house. We had been bothered by sneak thieves lately, and had been obliged to keep everything locked securely. Then the boy went to his room which was at the rear of the house, and I undressed and went to bed.

I am a sound sleeper; rarely does anything disturb me once I have lost consciousness, so that the clap of thunder that awakened me later in the night must have been unusually loud. It *did* awaken me, though, and with such a start that I had jumped out of bed and was standing shivering in the darkness before I was fully awake.

I could feel my heart pounding quickly as it does when I am frightened, and I had a strange sensation down the length of my spine as though a cold hand had passed its

clammy fingers there. And the thunder outside was ominous, terrifying in its nearness.

With an effort, I compelled myself to move over to the window so I could look out and convince myself that I was still in Vallieres.

I told myself that I had simply had a sudden shock in awakening, that I was an ass to be afraid, that I had only to raise my voice to bring the house boy scurrying in—but it was all in vain.

Then, in a flash of blinding light, a streak of lightning cut through the air and dropped toward the center of the graveyard. In that second I saw a burst of flame on the general's sarcophagus spring up to meet it, and there was a loud report like that of a small cannon. A little wisp of smoke rose from the grave, then all was dark again, and a peal of thunder crashed down upon me.

I did not know whether to jump back in bed and pull the covers over my head, or to dress and seek the company of fellow men, but I felt I could not remain any longer standing here in the room.

Whether or not light would have helped me, I do not know. I remember feeling the hair at the back of my neck raise in horror as a little breath of icy wind touched my throat, and I remember putting my hands around my neck to keep it off. I remember the awful apprehension growing within me, and I remember losing sight of the dim outlines of the windows in the room. But that is *all* I remember.

WHAT ACTUALLY happened then, I do not know.

When I came to myself again, I was dressed and outside my house. I opened my eyes and saw that the sky above me had cleared, and that the first yellow glow of the sun was

in the east. I had no recollection of leaving the house.

Then, when it dawned on me that I was no longer home, I sprang to my feet with a start. The sudden action caused me a twinge of pain, and I looked down at my feet uncomprehendingly. They were incased in my riding boots, and I was wearing my khaki breeches.

Both were damp, as though having been wet by the rain earlier in the morning, and dried to a certain extent by the heat of my body. My shirt, too, was damp, as was the wide helmet I wore.

In growing consternation, I saw that my hands were not mine. They were darker, the color of a mulatto's, although they were the same shape they had always been, and the right one still bore the small scar near the thumb where I had cut it two years ago.

I raised my head and looked about me. I had been lying at the base of the low wall around the old cemetery. The empty chapel and the Place d'Armes were those of Vallieres. It seemed that I had only crossed the open space between my house and here.

Yet why should I be wet? Why should I be filled with this overpowering fatigue? I felt exhausted; my legs had that sensation of pained weariness caused by a long day in the saddle.

With these questions in my head, I turned and looked into the cemetery. There, as I had seen last night, was the general's grave, the sarcophagus blasted by the bolt of lightning, little morsels of masonry scattered in all directions. No other grave was touched by the lightning, but the general's was cracked and torn till it was almost unrecognizable.

There was no reason, I told my-

self, for remaining here. The morning breeze that was sweeping up the valley made me shiver in my damp clothes, and I returned to my house. No one was up yet, and the room was just as it had been last night. My pajamas were thrown negligently across the foot of the bed, and the covers lay as they had been tossed when I sprang out.

I shook my head wearily, and went to look at the rest of the house to see if anything had been disturbed. An inspection revealed that everything was exactly as I had left it. I went into my makeshift bathroom, intending to wash. Then I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror.

Immediately I uttered a stifled cry, and dropped the soap I had picked up.

In the mirror I saw a man I recognized as myself, Alan Whiting, yet who was no longer the white man he had been last night. My face, like my hands, had darkened till it, too, made me seem like a mulatto.

How could this have happened? I asked myself in despair. What change had come over me?

I had become a Negro!

For a few moments I remained staring at myself in the glass, fascinated and repulsed by the sight that greeted my eyes. I could recognize myself, yet I was no longer the man I had been.

With a sudden frenzy of energy, I ripped the shirt from my body and looked again at myself in the mirror. Again I was startled—for although my face and hands were those of a Negro, the rest that I could see was still white.

A little wavering line of brown that ran down the center of my chest told me that my face and neck had been stained. Reaching for the

rubbing alcohol that was on the shelf beside me, I washed it off.

While I undressed and put on my pajamas, I constantly asked myself how I could have been stained. Had some one come into the house last night after I closed the door? It seemed the only explanation.

But how? And why had I been stained? Why had I been carried out and left sleeping beside the wall of the cemetery? Why did my limbs ache with fatigue; why were my legs chafed as though I had been horseback riding?

I called my house boy, who came in rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Leonce," I said, "where were you last night?"

He looked at me as though I had lost my senses.

"Right here, m'sie'," he replied.

"Did any one come into the house after you went to bed?"

"I saw no one, m'sie'. Did you expect a visitor?"

"Leonce," I said, "some one besides ourselves was in here last night. Who was it?"

His eyes opened wide in surprise, and his expression was candid enough to convince me he was telling the truth.

"I thought you were alone, m'sie'," he said. "I didn't know any one was here."

I saw he was as ignorant of the affair as was I.

I went out into the cookhouse. But I was disappointed; there was no one there. Nor did a cursory glance show anything missing. I stood there mystified for a moment, until my eyes lit on a tin of walnut stain that was standing on the table. I had been using it a few days ago to paint a chair, but I had not opened it since. Beside it lay a cloth which was colored by the fluid.

"What were you doing with the

stain, Leonce?" I asked the house boy.

"I didn't touch it, m'sie'," he replied. "It wasn't there when I closed up last night."

Suddenly I knew where the Negro stain had been procured for me. This was the same pigment that had darkened my skin last night. Immediately I began to look through the cupboards in the rest of the kitchen. Had I been asked what I sought, it would have been difficult for me to reply, for I did not know. There must be some clew, though, I reasoned.

My reasoning was faulty, however, for I found absolutely nothing. Everything save for the stain was in its accustomed place, and no hand had touched any of the articles in the kitchen since it was closed last night by Leonce.

My brain was tired, I realized, as was my body. I needed rest; my whole being called for sleep. It would be best to take a nap before attempting to solve this riddle.

"Cook me some eggs," I said to Leonce, "then I'm going back to bed."

IT WAS late in the afternoon when I awakened. A shower helped to chase the sleep from my eyes, and I dressed and went out onto the porch. From here I could see signs of activity in the graveyard across the Place d'Armes. I called Leonce.

"What are they doing over there?" I asked. "Did some one die last night?"

"No," said Leonce. "General Zephirin's grave was struck by lightning."

"Why are they all so excited about it?"

"It has to be closed over again, and his relatives haven't enough money to pay for it."

"But Zephirin's been dead for a long time now," I remarked. "Why bother to rebuild his grave if they can't afford it?"

"The commune decided to pay for it."

"Even so, it seems like an unnecessary expense. Why don't they use that money to buy screens for the meat market?"

Leonce did not reply at once. His eyes studied the scene in the little graveyard, and I thought I could detect signs of awe in his expression.

"Zephirin was a bad spirit," he said at last. "He was a powerful *papaloi* when he was alive. His *zange* can get out of his grave if it isn't sealed in."

"Superstitious nonsense!" I said in disgust.

Leonce was annoyed at my lack of sympathy. "They say General Zephirin rode through the hills last night to invite his forces to the ceremony he was going to hold when he was killed."

"You mean a voodoo ceremony?"

"Yes, m'sie'. He did the same thing years ago the night before he was killed."

Suddenly into my mind came the remembrance of my chafed legs this morning. Immediately I was inundated again by the flood of questions I had been unable to answer when I awakened and found myself lying in the shadow of the cemetery wall. Now I *did* seem to recall having ridden horseback. It was a dream-like sort of memory, however, fragmentary and vague. I could not have been actually on a horse, because I should certainly have been able to recall more of it than I did. I concluded that, having felt as though I had been riding before I went to bed again this morning, I probably dreamed I actually did ride

through the jungle growth that covered the side of the mountain.

And it was this dream that lingered in my mind. Yet why could I not account for the stain on my face and hands? How could I have been dressed and left outside in the rain?

As usual, I took my coffee out on the porch after my dinner. Lighting a cigarette, I sat there enjoying the cool, peaceful darkness of the evening. Leonce came out to say that he was going to spend the night with his brother, who was sick.

To-night was clear. Unlike yesterday, there were no clouds to mar the beauty of the tropic night. The stars were like bright lanterns and seemed to hang down from the sky, very near to earth. A fragrance of jasmine and frangipani was in the air, mixed with the pungent aroma of charcoal fires. And outside my house the palms rustled sleepily in the soft breeze from the towering mountains.

I must have sat there an hour or two, my mind turning where my imagination led it. Then, without any reason, I became afraid. I recognized the same fear I had experienced the previous evening when I stood alone in my room, the same unreasoning possessive fear that had no basis in logic and no excuse for existence.

In vain I told myself I had nothing to fear. The night was calm and peaceful, or, rather, had been up till this moment.

But now it changed into a dark mantle that held unknown terrors for me. I felt abruptly that every shadowy object was a menace to my life, and in every darkened corner there lurked some unseen assassin. I strove to regain possession of myself, but my fear was too great for me. It grew in volume until I could bear to sit on the quiet porch no

longer, and had to rise and go into my room.

Again as I closed the door I felt that icy caress of the wind on my throat, and my apprehension at this was suddenly frantic. With a resounding slam, I shut the door and bolted it securely.

Yet I could not escape the overpowering fear that held me. It weakened me like blood draining out of a severed artery, and I felt I was going to faint. A presence seemed to be in the room with me, a cold unknown presence that held me spellbound. I could not cry out; I could not move; I could only stand there, my body growing cold as though I had died, and were yet able to reason.

I struggled against the power, and resolved at all costs not to lose consciousness as I had last night. And that I *did* manage to keep my mind above the level of this irrational fear seems impossible to me now.

I remember how cold I grew, how dim became the objects in the room, how my fear became submerged in a gradual losing of perceptions until I was no more than a lump of clay with the smallest spark of thought remaining in my brain like the last cinder of a dying fire. Yet the spark remained; my body might be nothing but a senseless mass of flesh, but I still realized that I was a human being.

Even this must soon have left me had I not suddenly become aware of a new warmth stealing through me. For a moment I felt that, having died, I was being brought back to life again. Little by little, feeling returned to my limbs, and I could breathe without that ghastly fear choking my throat. Eventually I returned to my normal state and could use all my senses as easily as before.

BUT I WAS NOT the same!

I could think clearly again, and I could move freely, but I surpassed my former self. It seemed sheer delight to be able to see things again, to be able to touch them with my hands. The mere movement of my body gave me a strangely exhilarating, almost sensual, pleasure. Like a well-oiled machine I walked, stretching my legs before me and swinging them free to savor the delight this simple act gave me. Everything I did, every movement I made seemed graceful and pleasant.

Yet in the back of my mind there was a burning desire. I felt there was something I must accomplish, something that must come before the satisfaction of all other desires. Without actually knowing what it was, I unlocked the door to the porch, and walked out to the kitchen. Here I was surprised to find myself taking down the tin of stain from the shelf on which I had put it that morning.

I rolled back my collar and cuffs, and with a cloth I wiped the dark fluid over my face and hands, smoothing it on carefully and keeping an even tint all over. When I had finished, I wished to put the stain back on the shelf, but I found I was walking out the door of the kitchen before I had time to do more than glance around me.

In the calm darkness of the night, I walked across the Place d'Armes, and stood for a moment before the arched doorway of the chapel. Alone I remained, my lips uttering sounds I recognized to be the language of Haiti—which I had not learned yet. I was not surprised to hear myself whispering Creole, but at the same time I was surprised. With one part of my mind I took it for granted that I knew Creole

thoroughly, yet with another part I was amazed to find I could speak it so readily.

But I could not pursue this thought. After a brief pause, I continued on my way. Through the deserted streets of Vallieres I stole like a thief, walking carefully so as not to attract attention, yet trying to appear nonchalant in case I was unexpectedly recognized.

Before long I arrived at the corral of the gendarmerie. The guard, I knew, was at the other end of the stable, probably asleep, and I moved quietly to the picket line and led away one of the horses. Then, procuring a saddle from the storeroom, I went out into the night again.

It did not take me long to saddle my mount, and in a few minutes I was astride and headed out of town toward the misty heights of Morne Colas. The moon had risen by now, and in its light the trail was a silver ribbon that wound beneath the black lace of pommerose trees. The dusky pile of the mountain toward which I was riding rose mysteriously aloft from the valley, its sides dotted here and there by the glowing light of fires where the abundant wood of the jungles was being carbonized into charcoal.

And though I have often ridden through the hills after sundown, I have never experienced such pure joy in living as I did that night. The cool breath of the fragrant wind on my face, the easy motion of the saddle under me, and the soft night noises filled my being with unutterable happiness. Though I rode under twisted lianas whose shadows resembled huge distorted serpents, though I often plunged into the forbidding darkness of the jungle, I was no longer afraid.

My fear of an hour ago had left me; I felt at home, a part of this

mysterious nocturnal landscape. I looked about me with newly opened eyes to the beauty of the country. With a sudden spurt of gladness I recognized a palm tree, a mapou, a poinsetta, an almond tree, and I named each to myself as I passed—and I named them in Creole.

Little by little I became conscious of a persistent drumming in my ears. Faint, almost inaudible, it swept down from the heights above me, weird and unreal, like the mutter of distant rifle fire. The noise sent a sudden chill of pleasure through me, and I put spurs to my horse. The trail wound upwards, passing beneath moss-covered branches where orchids bloomed like pale ghosts in the moonlight.

As I mounted the slope, the sound of drumming became louder, more rhythmic. My pleasure turned into impatience, and I urged my horse to go faster, kicking him mercilessly in the sides. There were many little paths leading away from the trail, but I chose my way with the utmost unconcern. The route seemed familiar; I knew it as thoroughly as the palm of my hand, and it annoyed me to realize that I still had some distance to cover before I could arrive at my destination.

I did not remember ever having been on this trail before, nor did I picture in my mind what lay before me. I only knew that I wanted to be where I was going as soon as I could get there, and that I looked forward with pleasure to what would happen after I arrived.

At one fork in the path I pulled up my horse suddenly and dismounted. Set in the crotch of the Y formed by the converging trails was a stone monument about five feet high, covered with inscriptions such as I had never before seen in Haiti.

But I was not concerned with the stone. Its inscriptions were as baffling to me then as they would be at any other time. I went straight to the base of the monument and began digging with my hands in the soft loam of the hillside. I dug for a longer time than I had expected, my annoyance growing as I went deeper and deeper. Finally, however, my hand touched some hard flat surface, and I quickly uncovered a small iron box.

It was of heavy, hand-forged iron, and was rusted badly. Again I felt that odd sense of contradiction in my mind; one part of me was surprised to see the rust, and another part took it for granted that anything buried in the ground long enough is bound to corrode. I had to force the lid back on its rusted hinges, and found inside another box. This one was of lacquered wood, bound closely with heavy copper bands, crossing and recrossing over its surface.

Inside this, I found a bundle of neatly folded heavy red silk, a blue ostrich plume and a small leather box.

THE SIGHT of these objects pleased me enormously, and I felt a mounting excitement as I opened the leather box.

There, lying on a cushion of velvet, was a large diamond that sparkled evilly in the light from the moon. It was mounted curiously in the head of a flexible gold serpent that writhed realistically at my touch.

For a moment I remained there looking at it. The sound of drumming had intensified until I could hear every beat distinctly now, although it would have been beyond my powers to tell from where the sound emanated. It filled me with

a curious impatience, and I sprang to my feet and began divesting myself of my clothes.

In a few moments I was completely nude, and I can hardly express the pleasure I felt at being able to move my limbs freely. I examined my body attentively, and frowned when I saw my feet. They would never do, I realized. Stooping over, I deliberately rubbed them with the damp earth, until from toe to knee they were blacker than my already darkened face and hands.

Then I stood up again, and shook out the folds of red silk. It turned out to be a sort of long robe with narrow sleeves and a high neck. This I put on, smoothing it tightly around my hips, and arranging the voluminous skirt. I tied the soft material against my naked body with a long silk cord I found inside the robe. Afterward I took the plume and fitted its end into a socket above the diamond head of the snake. Then I wound the golden coils around my head, the plume in front, and passed my hand over my hair to see that all was well.

Wrapping my clothes into a tight bundle, I placed them in the box and left them lying in the hole I had dug. I was becoming excited now, and was feverishly impatient to be off. In a few moments, with the red robe wound around my knees, I was astride my horse and heading up the trail again.

The drumming became louder and more insistent. I could hear the sound of chanting now, high and disembodied, almost toneless, and its plaintive music filled me with disturbing anticipation. Ahead of me I could see a glow in the distance. It was from there that the noise was coming to my ears, carried on the wings of the soft tropic night.

The distance between me and the

light was lessened quickly as I put my horse to the gallop, and in a short while I rode into a clearing where a crowd of Negroes had assembled.

In the center of the clearing was a shelter made of palm leaves laid thickly over a framework of newly cut saplings tied together with liana rope. At one end of the rude shelter was a wooden altar draped in red cloth and laden with cups bearing food and drink. In the center of the altar was placed a cage of iron bars through which I could see the writhing coils of an immense serpent. Immediately I knew I had arrived at a voodoo *houmfort*.

The Negroes, on seeing me, sprang toward me with a great show of affection. They plucked the flares from inside the shelter, and gathered around my horse, talking excitedly. For a minute I sat there proudly, scanning their black faces. Then I told them to leave me and wait in the shelter.

A tall Negress, slim and graceful as a black leopard, approached me.

"All is ready, *mon pere*," she said.

I nodded. "And the sacrifice?" I asked.

"Waiting."

As she talked, she was unfastening her dress. When she had loosened it, she slipped it off, revealing underneath a red robe similar to the one I wore myself. In place of the golden serpent, she twisted a red bandanna into a crude sort of diadem and placed it on her head. Then she turned and gave a signal to the drummers.

There were three of them, each squatting on the ground, each bearing between his thighs a drum made from a hollow log with a piece of tightly stretched skin covering the end. At the signal from the girl, they took up a measured beating,

soft and provocative, like a mutter heard indistinctly. Instantly the Negroes in the shelter began singing a chant while they marched single file in a circle around the space of hard-packed mud.

I turned to the girl beside me.

"Go to your place, Marthe," I said, using her first name, although to my knowledge I had never seen her before, and had never heard her name mentioned. "We will begin."

She left me, and retired behind the altar. I, too, went back of the altar, but on the opposite side from her. There was a partition separating us, and through the loose boards I could hear a low moaning, as though some one were in agony on the other side. This moaning, however, instead of arousing my pity, only made me feel strangely excited.

I knew there was something pleasant connected with the sound, yet, judging from the moan itself, the person was not enjoying herself. But I seemed to have no time for reflection. All evening, in fact, I had been feeling strange new sensations from which I should ordinarily have shrunk away; but to-night there was an urge inside me, a pleasant anticipatory desire to plunge forward recklessly into every new adventure.

Standing in the semiobscurity behind the altar, I heard the drums increase in tempo, mounting to a moderate crescendo. Then abruptly they stopped. I knew suddenly that this was the signal for my appearance, and I walked from behind the altar into the circle of light thrown by the flares in the shelter.

AT THE SIGHT of me, the assembled Negroes threw themselves to the floor, and for a moment I stood there, haughtily erect, my arms folded on my chest. Then I

moved to the right of the altar and took up my position beside the cage which bore the writhing serpent.

At this the drums began beating again, and the Negroes rose.

"Daignez garder nous, O Rois Lois," they chanted, *"prends cas a nous nans consideration."*

The drums stopped their rhythm abruptly, and again the congregation prostrated itself. There was absolute silence during this moment; it was charged with indefinable dread, an ominous expectancy. The only noise heard was the slight rustle of the serpent as it thrashed its tail.

Then, like a queen of blood royal, Marthe walked into the light from where she had been behind the altar. She went to the opposite side from me, and turned her back on the Negroes, who began to chant again.

"O Reine Lois, virez dos et quittez nous oue ou."

Slowly Marthe turned in answer to the supplication, and faced the congregation. Then she looked at me, and smiled. Never have I seen a more inviting, a more provocative smile than the one Marthe gave me across the altar with its cups of *taffia* and food and its cage with the hideously writhing serpent.

I approached her, and together we lifted the cage and set it on the front edge of the altar where it was visible to every one of the assembled Negroes. Then, standing side by side in front of the altar, we began to chant, accompanied by the drums.

It was a chant of primitive people, containing dire punishment of the most horrible kind for any one who betrayed the secrets of the god Vaudoux. As we intoned the chant, the entire assemblage lined up and passed by in succession, each touching my outstretched hand, then that of Marthe's. When this was fin-

ished, I stepped in front of the serpent's cage and waited for the Negroes to regain their places. Marthe retired to the side of the altar she had occupied at the beginning. When all was quiet, I raised my voice and addressed the Negroes.

For a full ten minutes I told them of the oppression they were supposedly enduring under a president now dead for over fifty years. I admonished them to rise in a body and wipe out the tyrant. They should march on the capital, shed the blood of the politicians, stir up resentment among the peasants, kill all who stood in their way.

And as I talked, the drums increased their tempo, beating the intoxicating rhythm into the vitals of the gathering, making their bodies sway with the swing of the beat. Their shoulders and hands began to twitch. Like the approach of a storm, I could tell they were being worked up into a tense excitement, ready to break at any moment. And inside me I knew that I must hold them at bay for yet a while.

I stopped talking and returned to my place beside the altar. Immediately, like a black avalanche, a group of Negroes hurled themselves to the ground before the altar, and lifted their hands in supplication to the serpent.

Each had a favor to ask. Their prayers, like fetid smoke, rose about me, and in a sort of self-hypnotized trance I heard their utterances. One wanted revenge, another love, yet another money. And all addressed themselves to the serpent, imploring it to fulfill their desires.

The drums quickened their pounding; steadily, monotonously they beat their rhythm into my entrails. We were all caught in their spell now. I was no longer an entity apart; I had become as one with this

black, sweating, writhing assembly. I longed to throw myself down with the others before the altar, and like them tear my clothes from me in the delirium of the music. Yet I must wait a while, I knew.

I glanced at Marthe, and found she had been looking at me as though waiting for a signal. I nodded my head, and she turned and disappeared behind the altar.

The Negroes noticed her departure and drew back from in front of the cage, leaving a space of bare floor before the altar. They started a high, quickening chant, and the drums, pounding now with full volume, had clutched at the bodies of the entire gathering. They swayed their hips, leaning far to one side, then to the other, straining to hold their chests erect; and always their shoulders jerked spasmodically in time with the ever-increasing tempo of the drums.

Marthe reappeared, leading a small procession of three other Negresses. As in a drunken stupor, I watched them place several banana leaves on the floor. Then they disappeared again. When they came back, they were leading a young girl, dressed simply in a long white gown.

The girl looked frightened and made little whimpering noises of fear, but they were drowned in the intoxicating rhythm of the drums. At the sight of the girl, my heart leaped with joy.

Here, I knew, was the thing to which I had looked forward all evening.

WITH A DEFT motion, Marthe threw the girl to a kneeling position on the mat of banana leaves. The three other Negresses bound the girl's hands to her ankles and put a short log under her arching back to support her neck. Then, while

they chanted in time to the throbbing drums, they wound the girl's frail form with liana ropes.

Round and round they went, weaving the rope around her limbs, and fastening her head back so that her throat was exposed. In a few moments they had bound her so securely that she could not move a muscle.

During all this time, I watched these preparations with mounting excitement. The throbbing drums, the nasal chanting, the electric current that ran through the whole gathering, the movements of the Negresses as they bound the girl—all moved me strangely. I felt myself transported, charged with an exhilarating anticipation. Hardly conscious of the fact, I found I had been chanting with the Negresses as they worked over the girl.

I wanted them to hurry; I was impatient to begin. Every nerve in my tense body called for me to accomplish my purpose, but I realized that I must still wait.

When the girl was securely bound, the Negresses took the cage from the altar and placed it a few feet in front of her. Inside me, my heart beat faster and faster with the rhythm of the drums; I stared at the girl's upturned throat with a terrible fascination. Hurry! I was repeating in my mind. Hurry!

When the Negresses had finished, they led Marthe to the cage and helped her to mount upon its iron bars. Then they came to the altar and picked up a gleaming machete whose long, heavy blade had been ground to razor sharpness. Holding this as one would a scepter in hand, it to some monarch, they approached and tendered me the handle.

Immediately I felt a wild surge of exultation. I seized the machete

and held it high above my head. The drums rose to the final peak of frenzy; the singers raised their voices deliriously; the three Negroesses took empty bowls from the altar expectantly; and Marthe, on the serpent's cage, began to dance. Her shoulders, with short, nervous twitches, jerked forward and back while her hips swayed sensuously in a circle under her heaving breasts. The red silk of her robe billowed as she strained and rolled in rhythm with the frenzied drums.

With a slow, measured tread, I walked forward from my place at the side of the altar. Like one in a dream, I saw the black, writhing arms of Marthe as she danced above the serpent, the packed, swaying group of expectant Negroes, the soft dark throat of the girl on the floor. In my brain the drums throbbed maddeningly, in my chest, in my thighs, in the pit of my stomach. I was caught completely in the insanity of the rhythm, impelled to move forward.

Without hesitation, slowly I advanced toward the girl. The three Negroesses stationed themselves opposite me on the other side of her kneeling figure. They, too, felt the urge of the music; I could see it in their heaving hips, in their blood-shot eyes, in their flaring nostrils. Their hands, in which they bore the *lignum-vitæ* cups, trembled in anticipation. Yet still I advanced until I was directly beside the girl on the floor. I can remember the cool, smooth feeling of the banana leaves under my bare feet and the joy the sensation gave me.

I stared in fascination at the exposed throat below me. The girl was faint with horror and fear; her mouth opened to utter a cry, but no sound emerged from her dry lips. Her eyes looked at me with wild

dread, yet her expression only stimulated me.

With steady hands I lifted the machete above my head. The drums beat as though they had gone mad, and the voices of the singers rose with them. Then, with a deliberate movement, I plunged the knife downward and across that soft black throat.

There was a convulsive movement of the body under me as it strained against its bonds. Then it relaxed. With frantic yells, the three Negroesses bent over and held their cups to catch the rich red blood that was draining from the black throat beneath me. The Negroes in the gathering surged forward, and Marthe paused in her dance for a moment.

Then the drumming and singing broke out again with renewed vigor.

One of the Negroesses had filled her cup. Slowly she walked around the body and approached me, holding out to me the receptacle filled to brimming with the warm blood of the girl I had just killed. The light from the flares glowed in the rich red liquid; I took the cup and held it high in the air for a moment, while I stood motionless.

Immediately the drumming and singing ceased; a great silence of pregnant tension welled up in the night.

Every eye in the gathering was turned on me expectantly, and I lowered the cup to my lips and drank.

WHY REPEAT the lurid details of the rest of the evening? Why describe the frenzied rush that followed when I took the cup from my lips? The mad desire of every one to taste the warm human blood that had been spilled by my own hands?

Suffice it to say that after each had lifted one of the cups to his

lips, the drums burst out again with frantic energy. Marthe, through the medium of her dance, worked herself into a trance, and began speaking to the followers of the god Vaudoux.

To one after another she gave advice, and told them what they must do if they expected their prayers to be answered. Then, when she had fallen in exhaustion to the floor, the three Negresses removed her and took her behind the altar.

The dancing became general afterward. Such abandoned sensual writhing as I had never seen; yet I, far from being disgusted with the scene, joined in with the others, until we threw ourselves to the floor, worn out by the fatigue of such exertion.

I remember riding back through the gray dusk that precedes dawn. I stopped at the Indian monument, and changed back into my ordinary clothes, burying carefully the robes I had worn, then followed the trail back to Vallieres. I arrived at the corral of the gendarmerie, and left my horse standing outside the sta-

ble. When I walked into the Place d'Armes there was no one in sight, and I made straight for the cemetery. Here I leaned against the wall for a moment and looked at the graves.

A sudden weakness came over me, a painful, depressing feeling of having lost something; and then I remember nothing until I awakened, perhaps a half hour later, lying, as I had the morning previously, beside the wall of the graveyard.

I NEVER dared mention what happened to me that night. It never happened again. I asked the natives if they had heard the drums or if they had actually attended a ceremony, but they gave me evasive replies. One, and only one of those that I asked, confessed he had heard the drums, but he said he had been frightened and had not tried to determine their whereabouts. And I myself have never been able to find the scene of that night's wild debauch.

During the next day, the grave of General Zephirin was sealed again.

Vampire Bats

TWO rare vampire (bloodsucking) bats have been captured for the New York zoo. This species fastens itself to a body (human or animal) and sucks the blood for its sustenance. They can fasten and suck the blood without even waking the victim, if he is fast asleep.

It is these creatures that led to the belief in vampires who came in the night and sucked the blood of humans—who in turn, once the vampire had stolen enough blood to put them in his power, became vampires to prey upon more innocent victims. It is the first time vampire bats have been brought to civilization.



The massive wall of the glacier showed that the ice age was returning.—

Farewell to Earth

*Being a Sequel to the Story
in the October Issue by*

DONALD WANDREI

IN THE YEAR 1,001,950, Web Conning strode eastward toward the sea. Behind him lay the *Ellen*, the space-time cruiser in which he had traveled a million years ahead of his period. Behind him lay the crystal dome, where Warren Daniels and Ellen MacOrm had drunk of corporol and anadrenalin, drugs of retarded animation that made them sleep through almost a million years. And behind him, also, lay his shattered hopes, for Warren had abducted Ellen and set their date of emergence for the year 1,000,000, whereas Web had miscalculated and followed them nineteen hundred and fifty years too late.

There was no way of going back. Long ago, they had died and turned to dust. The girl he loved had waited in vain in this dismaying world, so different from the earth he had known.

Overhead hung a gigantic sun; a dull, dying, crimson sphere that covered at least one twelfth of the heavens, and yet shed only feeble rays, light that was cold and darkly red. Elsewhere, the sky seemed black and desolate. A piercing chill struck through the thin air. Shapes of strange vegetation freaked the plain through which he walked. Enormous fungi, gray and ghostly, flung their caps and tendrils to the sun. Powdery dust stirred hardly at all in the scant atmosphere. Neither

insect nor animal disturbed the solitude. This was a world of death.

Web had passed beyond self-recrimination, beyond hatred of Warren, almost beyond love and dreams, so deep was his bitterness at the results of his own error; but he walked on, for even despair could not wholly shatter his curiosity to know what this world of the far future was like.

In one hand, he held a piece of shale. Upon it were scrawled directions written by Ellen nearly two thousand years before; idle directions, for he had never come, and her days or years of vain waiting had long since become one with all eternity. He tried to forget, to suppress his thoughts, to interest himself in this alien world, but always a vision warped his gaze, a vision of the girl and the love that had meant as much to him as life itself. They were gone now, and life seemed hardly worth the living in this strange, barren land.

Or was it as barren as it looked? Might there not be people somewhere ahead? Surely the changes of a million years were vast, and the desolation around him did not necessarily mean that mankind had become extinct. What would these inhabitants of the far future be like? Or rather, of the present, he thought wryly. He whistled a tune of the middle twentieth century. The notes quivered hollowly, eerily

forth, a discordant and unnatural intrusion upon the brooding silence. After a few bars, he ceased. Silence was preferable to that forlorn echo of a dead eon.

Huge and waning, the sun shone dismal. Some catastrophe must have brought it far closer to earth, shortened its life, and drained it of energy. Its rays bathed the world in bloody color, like the reflection of a gigantic fire, or the glow of cosmic flames. But the air preserved its chill, and only sparse growths raised spikes and stalks of great alien fungus forms to the somber sky, as he made his way eastward, a lone traveler in eternity. He could not be far from the site of New York City, and if the old metropolis had perished, at least the Atlantic seaboard would be as probable a place as any to find the inhabitants of this queer world.

Again a pang seized him. What if his brilliant invention brought him only the irony of being the last representative of the human race? What inhabitants could there be? What had happened to Ellen and Warren? Had they died, leaving no record or issue behind them? Had they married, raised children, and lived their delayed natural span? If so, what would their descendants have become, during the course of almost two thousand years? Would they have intermarried with whatever other inhabitants there were? Or was this world as devoid of life as it looked? In that case, would not inbreeding have wrought profound degenerative changes in the race founded by Warren and Ellen?

Web racked his brain with idle speculations. They gave him no comfort. After a million years, his love persisted for that unusual girl as ever of old, and the cruel jest that fate had played him yielded only

recurrent pain. Never had he felt so lonely as now; never so desirous of the drowsy poppies of oblivion. To sleep, and for all time, appeared to be the end of desire and dreams. "Only the sleep eternal, in an eternal night"—the phrase from a famous poem ran through his head, together with another: "The moving finger writes, and, having writ, moves on."

He steeled himself to face whatever lay ahead. Regrets were as unavailing as the vanished years. Though he had lost love and the most precious values of life; though he was separated by ten thousand centuries from the period when he should have lived his span; though he had thus far found only a world deserted, in the year 1,001,950; though he should prove to be the last representative of the human race—yet the indomitable will to continue drove him on, the same grim determination that had carried man forward since the dawn days when he first found shelter and fire.

Shelter—fire—food. The inexorable demands of nature could be ignored no longer.

But of shelter, there was none. A rolling plain sloped eastward. He followed what was once a broad highway, but it lay covered with rust, rotted, broken by occasional fungoid growths. He passed several giant mounds, buildings of curious hypergeometric architecture, but now fallen to ruin. Miles ahead, he discerned a great blob on the landscape. If that was New York, it had indeed crept miles out into the Atlantic. The coast must have risen.

In all this vastness of land and sky, absolutely no other form of animate life was visible, not a sound came, and only a cold ripple of the rarefied atmosphere infrequently proved that nature had not com-

pletely run down. The fields around, black, and ocher, and brown, spread scarlet-bathed in the sun; grass, weeds, flowers, underbrush, trees—all were gone. Only the fantastic mushrooms, dwarf, and giant, great cones and whitish stalks and bulbous caps, appeared here and there. Web almost shouted with relief when he came upon a gray-green spiky plant—a cactus. It was his first evidence that fungi did not form the whole botanic world.

Fire raised a less imperative problem, unless night brought exceptional cold. In his pockets were a magnifying glass and an automatic lighter, either of which should suffice to produce fire, if he could find anything to burn or cook.

Food gave him his greatest concern. He was ravenous, and thirsty. He thought wryly that any one who hadn't eaten for a million years certainly deserved a good meal. The absence of game and fowl disturbed him, while the bleak landscape indicated that not in ages had any one traveled his way. The mystery of what great calamity had fallen the human race—war? invasion from other planets? holocaust from some unknown natural cause? cosmic disaster?—became of negative importance. He must find food and water quickly.

He decided to keep on toward the site of New York. The fungi might be edible, but perhaps better nourishment could be found at the metropolis, even if the city were deserted.

The slow progress of the sun suggested that the day had considerably lengthened. Web had no means of measuring time, but hours must have passed before he reached the outskirts of the city; yet the sun seemed not much farther westward than when he left his space-time

flyer. Distance was deceptive in this thin atmosphere. He wished he had used his cruiser.

He halted, appalled, on the edge of New York. The city presented a spectacle of colossal ruin that was overwhelming. Débris littered the streets, piled them in places dozens of feet deep with rubble. Small stone structures yawned emptily. Pylons and narrow towers soaring thousands of feet toward the sky gaped with broken windows and black fissures. Whole sides of edifices had been stripped away, and corrosion ate at the framework. It was as if a race of Titans had abandoned to eternity the megalithic remains of their dwelling place. Here and there, towering, serrated, obelisklike erections had crashed into tremendous shards. And not one voice called, or one footstep passed, or one bird sang, in all this heap of huge ruin. Even the frosty air, the waning, bloody sun, and the bleak landscape were testaments of desolation.

Web had not the heart to explore. The dull sun, the abandoned city, the sinister hue of everything, the primeval vegetation, drugged his senses. He turned wearily aside, took out a pocketknife, and began hacking experimentally at the nearest growths, a clump of ten-foot-high mushrooms resembling lepiotas of the twentieth century. Their texture was woody, but they looked edible. He did not much care whether they were. He had come to a reckless mood where he almost wished that a fatal poison were in them.

Raw mushrooms did not appeal to him, despite his famished condition. He entered the closest building, a small structure of marble and shattered, arabesqued glass windows. Inside, he found dust inch-deep; the

rooms of some ancient family residence; skeletons, whose very bones already disintegrated; golden yellow utensils that had outlasted human clay; heaps of powder which alone remained of unknown foods; and, most precious of all, a private artesian well. The fixtures were coated, eaten away, but they still produced water of metallic taste. He drank greedily before carrying away utensils laden with cold, clear water.

He set the pans in a little hollow before continuing his search for fuel. But of wood, there was none; neither tree, bush, nor grass; and he was forced to hunt far afield, even into the dead city's limits, before he found enough dried fungi and punk-wood from decayed furniture to build a fire. He dumped his loot in the hollow, departed again, and slashed at the lesser giant mushrooms until he had several huge stalks. These he carried back toward the hollow until he rounded the building from which he had obtained his pans and water. Then he halted in momentary paralysis, and his burden slipped to the ground.

A woman like a ghostly flame in the crimson of the sun was standing beside the hollow.

BOTH CREATURE and woman, she resembled the women of his age, yet with a difference. She was, if anything, of slighter build, but her limbs were longer than of old, and her whole chest larger, as if from the greater expansion required in a thinner atmosphere. A singular whiteness gave pale beauty to her skin. Her eyes were phenomenally large and luminous, and her face both wistful and stern. Platinum-colored hair hung in thick masses down her back. She wore a garment of rough texture, falling from shoul-

ders to thighs, and of such plain simplicity that it emphasized her exotic appearance. With slight sandals on her feet, she resembled in some ways the naiads of old Greek myth—Diana the huntress. There were strength and weakness in her figure, the soft, patrician outlines of inbreeding in her features, combined with the supple strength of those who must pit themselves against nature. She seemed lithe as a panther, able as a warrior, yet weaker than a woman; and she held an allure of extraordinary power.

More than all these physical characteristics, the quality that impressed Web most was her general resemblance to the Ellen of his memory. Instinctively, in the first shock of seeing her, and the glad surprise of finding companionship, he ran toward her with a sudden cry:

"Ellen!"

The girl looked at him with wonder that changed to a baffling expression of many emotions. Her hand flashed down, swept up with a tiny dart and a blow-gun aimed squarely at him.

The dart looked wicked. Web stopped, threw his hands wide.

"I'm unarmed. Don't let lose, for Heaven's sake. Who are you?"

An expression of uncertainty transformed the girl's face. There was the dawn of something akin to radiance. She opened her mouth, but whatever she intended to say remained unuttered. Web's keen eyes saw beyond the girl.

From behind her, along the ancient highway, approaching with sinister rapidity, came menace in multiple form. Could those be gray puff-balls, drifting silently along the ground?

"Behind you! Watch out!" Web shouted, and at the same time raced toward her.

The girl hesitated, whirled around.

Converging upon her, like a succession of giant bowling balls hurled at high speed, a stream of grayish masses rolled. They had no visible legs. Gelatinous, almost spherical, they advanced by a contracting muscular tension that gave them extraordinary impetus. Silent like everything else in this dying world, ruddy in the light of the sun, and purposeful in a way that was subhuman, subvertebrate, and primal, yet with an apparently conscious intent, they sped toward the girl. Big as bushel baskets, slimy as oysters, gray as the pallor of death, the fluid, quivering balls shot forward.

The nearest one was hardly a dozen yards away when she whirled. No more than a dozen feet separated them when she blew through the tube. A dart buried itself in the gray mass. It twisted crazily to a limp, formless, sloppy heap at her feet.

Again and again she aimed. The things skittered to rest around her in the collapse of death, but others came faster than she could mow them down. Web raced to her side. Weaponless, he had no idea how he could help; he did not even know the nature of this menace. A slug sped toward his feet. He jumped and landed squarely on the creature. It squashed into a pulpy mess that oozed momentarily almost to his knees before flattening out. He pulled himself free of the sticky stuff, and still the gray ones charged.

With sudden inspiration, he ran to the nearest dead monster and pulled out the dart. He plunged it instantly into a living creature. More slowly than the first victim, it whirled and tossed and spun to convulsive death.

The gray ones came on, silent,

driving like cannon balls. Never a cry issued from the girl, or a sound from the jellylike attackers. All the world around was still. The battle seemed like a nightmare, with the vast sun casting a liver-colored glow on fantastic vegetation and strange monsters.

Step by step, Web and the girl retreated. A sickening change took place, gave them unexpected aid. Some of the hurtling monsters turned aside to their fallen companions. Around each dead mass clustered a group of the living, and they visibly swelled while the motionless heaps were devoured. The poison on the darts must have possessed terrific potency. The bloated gray spheres wobbled off and succumbed, or died where they were, fat and ravenous, even while they fed.

Their numbers dwindled. Web and the girl, retreating more slowly, slew the beasts faster. The horde ceased to attack. Of that ferocious army, only stragglers remained. The two human beings mowed them down without mercy, singly and in groups, where they consumed the fallen. Only when the last sphere flattened did the fury of battle subside.

Trembling, exhausted, and bewildered, Web sat on a rock beside which the wearier girl had already dropped.

There was a silent communion that neither disturbed, until panting lungs and tired bodies had rested. Curiously, yet half indifferently, Web looked at the dozens of blobs around, and from them he turned his gaze back to the mysterious, lovely stranger.

"Who are you?" he blurted. "Where did you come from? What are these things?"

The girl looked at him with wide green eyes. At close range, her face

was weirdly attractive, with its delicate skin, soft lines, and determination. She owned beauty of an unusual kind. The sun brought tints of pale flame to her hair, and gave a smoldering glow to her features. She looked at Web from wise, interested eyes, though she seemed not twenty.

"I am Ellayn."

"Ellayn what?"

"No, Ellayn."

The girl regarded him with a puzzled expression. Her voice was very low, and slurry, as though she had not spoken to any one in a long while, and she had a queer pronunciation that made it difficult for Web to follow her. Roughly, her words were English, but about as unlike the English he knew as it was from the language of Chaucer.

"Don't talk now," he said abruptly. Fatigue lay heavy on Ellayn's face. She half smiled, like a child, as he continued: "Sit over here. I'm going to cook these mushrooms. We can talk after we've eaten."

He could not tell whether she understood him. She leaned back against a giant boletus and watched him while he built a fire. Her presence affected him oddly. She so much resembled the Ellen he had known; and yet her exotic characteristics—the large chest, small waist, long limbs, and delicate features with large, bright eyes—these were all at variance with the average woman as he had known her long ago.

Midway in his preparations, she suddenly rose with critical eyes. "Go 'way," she commanded. "That's no good."

Both piqued and amused, Web found himself dispossessed. She took charge deftly. He watched her expert fingers build the fire and cook the mushrooms about twice as rap-

idly and well as he could have done. She hummed an eerie song as she worked; and the wordless tune, plaintive, lyrical in her soft voice, captivated him.

When the scant meal was prepared, she handed the lepiotas to him with a shy gesture. He evidently puzzled her as much as she did him, but a disconcerting attitude of proprietorship had crept into her manner. Her large eyes examined him with a sort of pleased curiosity. Without a word, she curled beside him. They ate in silence, Web ravenously, the girl rather indifferently. Web was bursting with questions, but curiosity never yet proved stronger than thirst and hunger.

He had not quite finished when he looked up and found Ellayn's green, luminous eyes fastened upon him. Her lips parted, and he barely noticed her small, sharp teeth before she electrified him with a simple statement.

"I am glad you came, Web Conning."

In a vague fashion, he had half expected something of the sort, yet the words were a bombshell in this world a million years beyond his time. Perhaps he had heard wrongly. It was hard to understand her slurred, alien syllables. She possessed a powerful attraction. Perhaps this was all a weird dream. Still, the appearance of wistful, human, childlike faith on the face of this strange young woman was as real as the memory of Ellen.

"How did you know? Who are you?" he asked, a sudden tightness in his throat.

The girl listened intently. She found it likewise difficult to understand. He repeated his questions slowly, each word distinct. Her face lighted.

"My mother told me."

"Who was your mother?"

"Ellayn."

Web figuratively tore his hair. The girl was exasperating. Her answers were so simple as to be obscure. The conversation got nowhere. But the very naïvete of it was a refreshingly human touch.

"Listen, angel——"

"Angel? What is that?" She frowned with delightful seriousness.

"Never mind. I'll tell you in a better way soon enough. But I'd like to know, why did your mother mention my name?"

"Her mother told her."

"And who was *her* mother?"

"Ellayn."

Web started to swear, then smiled. The simple sureness of this elf disconcerted and disarmed him at the same time. He laughed and suggested: "I suppose *her* mother was also Ellayn?"

"Yes." The girl gazed at his face. Gradually, her own serious expression changed, lightened. She smiled, uttered a musical laugh, then looked surprised.

"I've never done that. What is it?"

"Never mind, Ellayn. I'll tell you sometime."

Web smiled, the girl responded, and the ice was broken.

"WHAT DO you know about me? How did you know who I was?" Web insisted.

Slowly, in her peculiar English, she recited a story that she had evidently learned by heart when an infant.

"I am the daughter of Ellayn, who was the daughter of Ellayn, until far back there was the first Ellayn. She and Worin were the first two. All the Ellayns and the Worins came from them."

"Worin?"

"Like you."

Web took a deep breath, so strong were the emotions that gripped him. Ellayn and Worin—Ellen and Warren—names modified only slightly in the course of time. So Ellayn was a descendant of the Ellen he had loved!

"Go on," he urged eagerly.

Ellayn continued, with grave, intent eyes, like a child remembering a lesson.

"I was told by my mother to look for Web Conning. He would come out of nothing like the first Worin and Ellayn. He would look like you." Web smiled, but did not interrupt. "When you came, the Ellayn who found you was to tell you that she is yours. The first Ellayn was yours, but you did not come. I found you, so you are mine."

In that profound moment, a host of memories flooded Web's mind. Ellen had never lost faith in him. All through the years of exile, she had waited; and though she waited in vain, she had built up in her children a legend so strong that when she came, her child, of whatever generation, would know him and carry to him her spirit. Greater faith had no woman, for Ellen's was a love that outlasted the centuries and defeated even the grave. Motivated by complex impulses, Web gently bent over and kissed the fragile lips of the girl. She looked startled, bewildered, till a change came with a rush of warm radiance, and she leaned beside him, her face aglow.

Web sighed deeply, hungrily. "Go on," he commanded. "Where are the other Ellayns and Worins? How many are there?"

"There aren't any. I am the last one."

He stiffened. "What?"

"There were only a few. There is not much food. They died early, and the meebbs caught many."

"Meebbs? Who are they?"

"Those. We killed them when I found you." She pointed to the gray heaps sprawled not far away.

Meebbs? Meebbs? A light dawned on Web. Meebbs—amœbas. The spheres were giant amœbas. Somehow, somewhere, in the past, life had become extinct, so that only the lowest and simplest organisms had survived, or had opportunity to re-begin the long course of evolution. The one-celled amœba had escaped catastrophe, and during the course of thousands of years, it had evolved to the size he saw; a sea-dweller now developing the power of land locomotion, just as the slime of primeval seas had given birth to land vertebrates, and so in the progress of millions of years had produced the genus homo; a formidable monster already, little more than a huge stomach motivated solely by the basic need of food.

He became conscious of Ellayn's soft voice.

"The meebbs live along the sea. They stay in it by night and come out after the sun rises. They are very hungry. They killed many of us. They caught my people. The darts kill them, but they slew my people when they were not on watch."

"And you are the last one?"

"Yes. I have not seen an Ellayn or a Worin for——" She shrugged her shoulders.

"How long?"

"The sun has risen and set more than this many hundred days since I last saw one." She spread her fingers wide.

Web gasped. A thousand days, three years, perhaps nine or ten years of time as he knew it, taking

into consideration the longer day. Nine or ten years without a human voice, without companionship, without conversation! No wonder Ellayn had trouble remembering words! His heart went out in sympathy for this apparently frail creature who had somehow found the strength to survive through desolate years of loneliness more complete than that of *Crusoe*, who at least knew that other people were alive.

"How did you happen to be here when I came? Do you live in the city?"

"I stay here." She turned her green eyes upon him with frank confidence. It was amazing how readily and easily she accepted him. "I knew you would come. The first Ellayn would not let her daughter marry until after her seventh birthday. I think our years are longer than they used to be. There is a story I heard that long ago they were only a third as long as they are now, because the day was shorter. Every Ellayn since was free until seven. She was yours if you came. The first Worin fought, but Ellayn won. The habit was made a rule. My people have always lived here. The first Ellayn said you would come down this road when you came. So we have lived here. I found you, so you are mine."

The girl looked both wistful and starved, but with a radiant happiness now overtoneing her face.

Web again lost himself in reverie. His *Odyssey* of time and space had not been wholly wasted. His flight through the universe, his annihilation of centuries brought him at least close to the woman he sought; and though he had arrived two thousand years late, the gods were kind. He imagined too keenly the years of Ellen's waiting, with hope growing ever dimmer; her hard struggle for

existence in a hostile world, and mated to a man she did not love; her laborious efforts to establish the legend of Web's coming; and her great task of educating from memory alone her children, in order that the fruit of civilization might not perish. He visualized the development of the new race, its attempts to adjust itself to a radically changed world, the modifications of eyes, skin, limbs, lungs, and physique that were necessary for adaptation to this dying planet.

But what was done, was done. Nothing could recover the dead from oblivion. Web forced his thoughts from morbid retrospect.

"Are you rested enough?" he abruptly asked the girl. "Come—show me the city and where you stay."

UPWARD, EVER upward, on top of buried streets, around massive blocks of marble and shattered sculpture, across mounds of débris, over the wreckage of ancient New York, Web and Ellayn made their way. She told what she knew of the missing million years; how it was said that in olden times a great city had thrived, and other cities elsewhere, till the coming of a comet that sucked away the atmosphere and caused the earth to shake. Animals, birds, and fish, legendary creatures to her, had perished with the human race. Somehow, the first Ellayn and Worin had slept on, and when they wakened, they alone survived.

They made their home in New York. They explored a little, but virtually all their life was occupied with raising children to perpetuate the race. Having not much more than mushrooms for food, in an atmosphere far thinner than the air to which they were accustomed, a

longer day and a night of arctic cold to contend with, possessing few medical supplies, they were faced at every turn with defeat. They might well have been Adam and Eve relying on their own resources in a later-day wilderness. They might easily have chosen death except for the inexplicable, indomitable will of humanity to survive at any cost and against all odds.

Through the labyrinth of tremendous ruin, Ellayn led Web toward the city's heart; and upward by ways winding toward one colossal structure that soared to the very heavens, a tower rising more than a mile above the tallest buildings around it; a vast finger, erect and challenging, like Titans' work, symbolizing defiance of time and space.

They entered it at some unknown floor, so deep was the wreckage and débris in the street.

"This is my home," said Ellayn.

There were caskets of roughly fitted golden-yellow plates in the room they entered. Floor after floor they ascended, and caskets occupied each, a meager array representing the last survivors of humanity, Ellen's and Worin's children.

Near the last level, Ellayn pulled Web away from the warped staircase into a chamber where the light of the sun filtered somberly upon twin coffins resting side by side.

"The first Ellayn and Worin," she informed him simply.

Web felt as if he had plunged into icy waters, and the poignant irony of the situation struck him like a blow. Here lay the bones of the girl he had loved, pursued through time and space, and lost; beside her, the man who had cheated her, tricked her, won her, abducted her into a future age. In a single gesture of devotion, Web stooped over the coffin lid beneath which Ellen

slept her last sleep, by that symbol uniting himself with her through her child of the hundredth generation.

Ellayn looked on, interpreting vaguely, and made no response when Web spoke gruffly: "Let's go on."

They climbed wearily to the top-most pinnacle. Through a decaying skylight, they emerged upon an observation platform that was already weathering away. Web caught his breath at sight of the wild panorama on every side.

To the north, leagues and hundreds of leagues off, stretched the glittering, frozen wall of a glacier. As far as he could see from west to east, that stupendous wall of reddened ice swept toward distant horizons where it vanished over the rims of the world. The ice age, the age of glaciers, must be coming again. Above that titanic glacier which capped the entire northern world, the sky gaped slaty black and cloudless.

Eastward curved the Atlantic, as smooth as glass. Only along its shore did specks move—amœbas seeking prey. Southward and westward lay worn hills and starved earth, a land of barren age, scarred with the ruinous cities of a civilization that had perished. The scene was appalling in its immensity and bleakness. The fading sun, now sinking westward, stared like the bloodshot eye of a giant upon this wreckage of a planet. The air, never warm, even at mid-day, grew chillier with the waning of afternoon. Web shivered, as much from awe at the great brooding desolation as from cold.

Ellayn regarded him with solemn eyes. Grave child of eternity that she was, she knew what an oppressive weight the panorama must be casting on his thoughts.

Silently, Web turned away, and they began the descent. Many floors down, Ellayn drew him aside from the staircase well to a passage westward. Tottering, insecure, the flying arch curved to a smaller tower a half mile off.

"Where does this lead to?" Web asked.

"Things. I do not know what," she replied simply. "I often go there and look at them. Sometimes I take one I like."

Midway across the arch, where a section of floor had fallen, Web looked down through thousands of feet of space. There was less débris in the streets here; he thought he could detect traffic levels, bizarre architectural designs such as had been projected by artisans of his time, setbacks, and hanging gardens; but the dream city was only a crumbling skeleton.

From the arch, they came out into a spacious room. At this height, the structure occupied a full city block. Its base must have occupied acres of ground. Many other rooms adjoined this one, and all were laden with treasures. Ellayn had taken him to a museum.

She led him first to a corner where she proudly showed him the things she had picked out for herself—bracelets, rings, necklaces, Mayan ornaments, Chinese jade, lockets from Persia, the delicate and often eccentric jewelry of later civilizations. She had chosen well of pearls and blazing gems and patterned gold to emphasize her beauty.

He at length turned away from these trinkets to other objects. This was the floor of music, evidently; and amid a few familiar instruments, some of which had corroded or rotted almost to dust in the display cases, lay countless others of strange shape whose tone he could merely

guess at; winds and iridescent metalloids; electrical and supersonic devices of intricate pattern; keyboards that played color, and keys that transformed light into sound and sound into symphonies of many-colored light; the highly developed and to him almost meaningless musical arts of a culture that must have considered this the highest æsthetic expression of man's aspirations.

Room by room, he examined them; floor by floor, he descended. The graphic arts were represented by sculpture of godlike beauty and profound symbolism, presenting cycles of myth and fable and vision far beyond his understanding; once impressive and magnificently conceived canvases which disintegrated in their frames; miracles of gorgeous color and at times terrifying suggestion in their exhaustion of the possibilities of the physical and imaginative realms; batiks of decadent splendor. There were architectural models of asymmetric and ultrageometric lines. The hall of the dance held complete pictorial recordings of dances and dancers whose art had developed supernal meanings during thousands of centuries.

As they descended, all that was finest and highest in man's goals passed before their eyes in retrogression. Below the floors of the eleven arts they came to the exhibits of crafts; metal-working and pottery, textiles and fabrics, weaves; through them all, as through the basic arts, running a lushness of color, a beauty of form, and a richness of design that were infinitely and sometimes disturbingly alien to the life he had known. Two new colors tortured his eyes. Pictures of a fantastically leisurely life; scenes of wars and events, inventions and fancies; pleasures beyond

dreams; dreams themselves of cosmic majesty; all the characteristics of an age of luxury, plenty, and carefree living drew his attention and told him something of the fate of man in that lost million years.

Then the sciences; planetariums; biological and racial exhibits; experiments in plastic, prenatal molding. Web felt a queazy sensation in studying skeletons and preserved figures when he saw that man had found the secret of changing his own physical nature.

The race that perished had been a race of small, exquisite people, winged and single-sexed, each individual combining the features of the two sexes of his day. The very thought of the immense gulf separating his period from the climax of a million years made him dizzy, opening vistas of a wholly new culture rising from an artificially created race of different sensations, æsthetics, purposes, pleasures, and existence from those he knew.

The chemistry and metallurgy exhibitions escaped his comprehension. There were more than a dozen new elements above ninety-two. In the hall of medicine and surgery, he found the record of triumph over disease. Bacteria had been eliminated, sickness had become a thing of the ancient past, all the afflictions of humanity had been conquered. There was evidence that these ethereal beings lived for hundreds of years.

Thus, always downward, overwhelmed with these vestiges of a golden age, they made their way through all the halls of science to the floors of mechanics and invention. Here were the machines that replaced the labor of man; complex, elaborate, gleaming equipment of stainless alloys; machines that tapped the energy of sun, and moon,

and tides, of the earth's core and matter itself; individual machines that took care of all work once performed by hand; master machines controlled from a distance, perhaps by rays or waves unknown to Web's generation, and which themselves controlled dozens, hundreds, thousands of lesser machines in a manner almost rational.

At the bottom of this titanic monument of man's achievements lay a library, symbolizing communication as the root of all knowledge; a library whose scope rivaled imagination; ancient volumes; microscopic trifles that showed up as weighty treatises or elusive poems under the lens of a magnifying glass; books of metal leaf thin as a windowpane, yet containing thousands of pages; books of cryptic symbols and nature, to be solved only with the aid of obscure apparatus that transformed the symbols to light and the light to sound.

Here were the records of the last world conflict in 21,346 which almost destroyed civilization; the slow rebuilding of life through cons; three invasions of entities from other worlds; strange plagues from outside; earthquakes that sank entire countries; creation of new elements near the year 500,000; the encroachment of a horde of monsters created out of cells and tissue in laboratory research; rediscovery of the secret of releasing atomic energy in the year 602,981, a discovery that burst beyond control and started an explosion that progressed with volcanic fury around the world, again annihilating most of mankind; the labors of survivors to rebuild anew; creation of the winged, single-sexed race to meet changed conditions, during the thousand years ending in 745,200; the final extermination of microbes responsible for disease;

then the flowering of mankind until the swift, terrible coming of a dark star near the millionth year which sucked all air off the earth, raised enormous tides, swung the sun close to the earth, and then shot onward, sweeping the moon with it, and leaving the earth a dead planet.

Yet these were only tantalizing glimpses. What had the golden age really been like? Had decadence set in? Were the little people subject to empty living because the last goals had been reached? Why had interplanetary communication been rarely treated? Was human life characteristic of the earth alone? Had the achievement of goals removed all incentive to ambition, invention, and exploration?

In the darkened room where they now stood far below the level of *débris*, and by the light of antique candles that they had taken from a case on the upper levels, Web and Ellayn read the brief account of the tragedy, the newspaper story which came as a climax to the despairs and hopes and turmoil of a feverish day, telling of the definite approach of the fatal dark star. Web wanted to read no further, to investigate no more this tomb of a city, to learn nothing additional of the symphony of humanity which had ended in the chord of death.

"Let's go," he said huskily to Ellayn. "I can't stand this. We'll take my cruiser and head away from here."

THE SUN was halfway sunken when they reached the *Ellen*. Exhausted, worn from the rigors of battle and exploration, of long walking and insufficient air, Web looked on his gleaming cosmocraft with relief. The girl regarded it with weary interest. She evidently had little strength of sustained effort.

They entered, and Web threw the controls. A quiver shook the craft as atomic energy drove it up. Ellayn cried out and clung to Web.

"Easy does it." He smiled at her. "But if that's the effect it has on you, just wait for the next start. What a jolt I'll give her!"

Ellayn relaxed. Under the white light of his cruiser, she looked more real. Her complexion was extremely pale, probably because of the sun's weakened rays which made protective pigmentation unnecessary; while her eyes, large and luminous the better to see in feeble light, gave to her face a wistful appeal. "Long legs," Web thought, "to cover ground and escape those infernal amœbas. Bigger chest to get enough oxygen out of this thin air. Small waist. No wonder. Anybody's stomach would grow tired of a mushroom diet. But she certainly is Ellen plus. I'm glad she's not one of those two-sexed things that seem to have become the fashion while I was traveling around." Aloud, he asked: "Which way, Ellayn? East or west?"

"That way," she answered immediately, pointing toward the Atlantic. "I can walk west. I have never gone this way."

Eternal curiosity of woman—and man. Web, too, wondered what had happened to Europe. Eastward he set his course, and the *Ellen* swung around.

"Oh!" cried Ellayn, snatching away something that momentarily pressed against Web.

"What's the matter?"

She showed him a cluster of darts. He had forgotten them since the battle with the amœbas.

"What are they? Why do they kill so fast?"

Ellayn shrugged. "I don't know. There is a big mushroom with a

ring around it. It grows out of a cup. My mother told me to boil the mushroom and put stuff from the museum in it when the water is almost gone. Then I put it on the darts."

She showed him a bottle of brown fluid. What it was, he could not tell without analysis; doubtless a powerful poison. The fungus, he guessed, was the deadly amanita, fatal even in small doses.

Below them spread the blackened Atlantic. Above, the stars shone with a dazzling, frosty brilliance unrivaled in his memory. A swath of phosphorescent glory marked the Milky Way. In this clear atmosphere, the stars blazed with countless splendor, but nowhere did Web recognize a constellation, a group, or even a single star. A million years had passed, and the heavens above had become as foreign as the earth beneath.

The *Ellen* leaped ahead, shot onward at high speed. Less than a half hour elapsed before they neared the British Isles, when Web turned on the mile-long finger of his telelux.

A blinding beam cut downward, sweeping the still waters. It moved forward, backward, in all directions; but where England had risen, only the eternal sea lay at rest. He set his course southeast toward France and Europe. The waters were dead. Since the moon was gone, gone were the tides. The sun, because of its retarded motion, had little effect on oceans. Absence of wind and waves prevented aëration. Marine life could not exist. Only the one-celled amœba, lowliest of life-forms, had escaped extinction.

Silent seas. Wind forever still. Song of birds, rustle of leaves, flowering of nature, change of seasons, voices of human beings—van-

ished for all time. Darkness over Europe. Bleak plains and bare hills where no fungus grew. Starved earth parching toward final oblivion. Wreckage of cities. Giant masterpieces of architecture, towers of impressive and appalling desolation. Desolation brooding over nations and continents. The old age of the earth. Darkness in Europe, twilight of a world, death of a planet. Phrases and pictures fitted through Web's thoughts, weaving a tapestry of somber mood.

The *Ellen* bored southward across the Mediterranean, swung toward Egypt. Deserts stretched endlessly on. Mountains fretted the distance with black peaks. A ravine remained of the Nile. And yet—a dark patch of its delta leaped into the glare of Web's searchlight. He swung the *Ellen* in a circle.

"Look! Trees!" he cried, and dipped his cruiser down.

Circling in a wide spiral, he dropped toward vegetation that became clearer with increasing speed. He decelerated, brought his cosmocraft to a perfect landing. Ellayn, who had peered down with the interest of a child during their trip, bounced out in enthusiasm.

"Not so fast," cautioned Web. "Where there are forests, there may be animals." He collected an automatic and a machetelike blade from his supplies.

Bitter cold struck them when they stepped outside. Ellayn gasped and Web's lungs labored in pain as they drew on that rarefied, subzero air. He pulled her back to the cabin and slammed the door.

"You'll freeze in that thin dress," he warned. "*Brr!* Thirty below if it's one."

Ellayn rubbed her face, smiled at him ruefully. Web took a couple of suits out of the storeroom. They

were close-fitting, with atomic heat units, oxygen rectifiers, and visors of flexible glyptol. Vibrators at the mouth and ears enabled Web and Ellayn to talk. Teleluxes in the hoods lighted their way.

Warm, breathing easily again, Web led Ellayn toward the forest.

"What curious trees!" he exclaimed.

All around them stretched a weird forest. Trees like vegetation of the Carboniferous Age rose to a height of some ten feet. Upon a single stalk, many limbs grew, hanging limp, like tendrils. There was no grass. The trees or bushes stood at irregular intervals. Their trailing branches ended in clusters resembling a cup of moss. The everlasting silence prevailed.

"Nothing here," said Web, discouraged and weary. The absence of wild life was so obvious that he made no attempt to explore farther.

"I'm tired," Ellayn murmured.

"You take the ship. I want to sleep on solid ground for a change."

"No." Her green eyes blazed. "The ground is mine. I am used to it. You go in the ship."

"Then we both sleep outdoors."

They argued, debated, stormed. Web's instinctive chivalry and growing love for the girl would not let him see her bear hardship. She refused to listen. Tired as they were, they became mutually stubborn.

Ellayn flung herself on the ground and declined to answer. Web flatly rejected a berth on his cosmocraft. He was tempted to thrust her bodily inside. She was the last woman alive. Above all else, her safety came first, for the human race must survive. Perhaps it would be best if the two stayed as near each other as possible.

Ellayn already slept. Her face showed as a blur of loveliness

through the mask of glyptol. Warm in the protective suit, she would doubtless sleep till dawn. Web's speculations halted at that point. Complete exhaustion overcame him. He dropped to the ground beside her, passed into deep slumber.

THE SUN'S rim rose, casting ruby light upon land, sea, and sky. The piercing cold lessened in severity. The air became warmer. A layer of frost everywhere, the sole proof that precipitation still occurred and that the phenomena of nature had not ceased, began to dissolve.

A shudder passed through trees whose trunks were willowy and whose branches resembled tentacles or snakes. The limbs quivered, flexed, moved about oddly. They swung toward the figures of the two who slept.

There came a dreadful change.

The curious trees rose higher. Roots like fingers appeared. The tentacles waved ominously, restlessly, writhing toward Web and Ellayn. The fingerlike roots emerged into full sight, stretched ahead, sank into the soil, while other root-fingers followed.

The whole forest went into motion!

Softly, slowly, with a stealthy and hideous purpose, as though animated by intelligence, the trees moved—walked—

From all sides, they converged upon the sleeping pair. A sibilance attended their progress. Murmurs like far-away wind or ghostly voices disturbed the dawn. The trees marched, hungry root-fingers and tendrils straining ahead. Were they speaking among themselves? Did they whisper of evil plans? What did they intend? Had nature produced these in a last struggle for

survival in a changed and antagonistic world?

The foremost tree reached Ellayn. Its branches swooped down. Tendrils twined around her. Avid suckers fastened at random upon her. They bore her aloft.

Ellayn opened her eyes. She struggled impotently, shrieked. The shock of wakening to that frightful experience wrenched one scream from her before she fainted.

Web dreamed of a day long ago when he had raced to the crystal dome. In his nightmare, he saw again that impregnable hemisphere, Ellen and Warren inside. He dreamed that he beat upon the walls. He dreamed that Ellen raised appealing eyes and cried out for aid. He dreamed that he strove in vain to break the barrier between. Dream-horror chained him. Slow, infinitely slow, were his movements. Warren leaped toward Ellen and throttled her cries. Web hurled himself against the crystal dome. It shattered like a bubble. He awakened.

"Ellayn!" he shouted, aghast.

The terrors of sleep paled before this terror of wakefulness. Hungry tendrils were swooping at him. Ellayn's limp form swung in the air a dozen yards away. Feelers ripped her protective suit off. Suckers fastened themselves to her body.

These trees not only had the powers of locomotion, some rudimentary form of intelligence. They were carnivorous as well!

Web rolled aside, escaped the straining tendrils by inches. He bounded to his feet, swung the machete in one swift arc. It sheared a tentacle. The tree writhed. A gout of sap, scarlet in the sunlight, bubbled from the incision. An eerie whistle emanated from the plant-thing as its branches shook furiously. All the other vegetation ad-

vanced like grim avengers. They came fast, amazingly fast, but Web sped faster. He must rescue Ellayn, or go down with her!

A group of trees clustered around the one that had captured her. They thrust hungry branches out. The first tree folded its prey closer. Tentacles knocked against limbs.

The tree-things were fighting among themselves for Ellayn!

Anxiety, fear, desire, horror—complex emotions spurred Web on. Hundreds of trees were now alive, stalking toward him. If they formed a closed circle—what chances would he and Ellayn have of escaping?

A tree-thing wrapped all its branches around the trunk of another, heaved, tore it bodily from the soil. Its roots wriggled. The victor fastened suckers of pulp on the roots, devoured them. The captive thrashed madly for only a moment before it relaxed in death. Its captor flung it away.

As Web raced toward Ellayn and took in these fantastic scenes, a plan came to him. He dodged a couple of the things, hacked limbs until his arm grew weary. He saw with terrifying clearness the suckers fastened on Ellayn's white body, and the red weals that they raised. A tendril entwined his left leg and almost tripped him. He lopped the feeler off, dove headlong for the thing holding Ellayn aloft.

Perhaps it did not notice his attack. It was stalking away from him. Perhaps it needed all its attention to defend itself against the others. Whatever the cause, its roots were half visible, and Web with one clean stroke sliced through them all. The thing collapsed with a sibilant whistle. Ellayn fell free of the cup-shaped, spongy suckers. Tentacles from near-by trees darted after her. Web dropped his machete and

caught her. He staggered, thrust his way out of the tangle of tendrils of the dying tree.

It was a desperate race that he ran. He fled from trees that came like hunters. He wove his way wherever an opening showed. The machete gone, he had only his legs to rely on. And Ellayn was a burden, though a pleasant one.

A group of the plant-things ringed the *Ellen*. He was rapidly becoming winded. The air whispered with voices. A half mile beyond the forest he saw patches of the blood-dark ocean. Its waters rippled, dots emerged and rolled ashore. He became panicky. Amoebas—coming out with the sun's rising to hunt for food. The distant balls rolled aimlessly around for moments; then, having somehow got his scent, bowled inland at disheartening speed. Some dodged the trees. Others fell prey to the plant-things. Tentacles looped them aloft, folded them inward and upward beyond reach of rival trees.

In this hell of nature, Web stumbled toward his cosmocraft, wondering if he would ever make it. The ring of trees encompassing it moved nearer. One great stalk stood between him and the door. Half of its root-fingers withdrew from earth, stretched on to plant themselves again. The tentacles strained ahead. Web saw his only chance.

With all the momentum he could gather, he lunged straight at the stalk. The crash sent him sprawling. Its branches flailing, the tree wobbled and toppled over. Web rose with Ellayn and staggered into his ship. Suckers thudded on the door, great gray spheres plopped against it as he slammed it shut.

A MINUTE later, the waters of the Atlantic raced underneath. He

set automatic controls before trying to revive Ellayn. The girl came out of her faint quickly when he forced a stimulant down her throat.

She opened haunted eyes and clung to him with fear.

"You must have had a bad dream," Web suggested.

"The trees—they walked——"

"What trees? Nonsense. I brought you in here last night after you fell asleep. You must have dreamed."

Ellayn sighed. Whether she believed him or not, she seemed content. Sweet as the moment was, Web interrupted it to get makeshift clothes for her.

"Where are we going?"

"To New York. After that—away."

They reached the city in fifteen minutes. Web set the *Ellen* on top of the museum. Insisting that Ellayn guard his flyer, he went down alone and returned with a dozen books, Ellayn's trinkets, several films, and a number of other things. The books covered basic sciences, including a history of the earth and a survey of arts. The films were technological.

"We're leaving," he told the girl. "Now where?"

He shrugged. "We're going to leave the earth entirely. Maybe we'll come back, some day. Maybe we won't. But we've got to go. We can't live here, and if we did try to, it would be a losing battle. The earth is dying, and nothing we could

do would change fate. Here, eat these before we leave." He handed her a couple of pellets.

She looked puzzled. "What are they?"

"Food; concentrated vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, starches, and minerals."

The sentence meant nothing to her, but she ate greedily.

"And that's that. The earth is dying. Say good-bye to it, Ellayn, for we're about to go. We'll return later, perhaps, and get whatever else we need, but it won't be for a long time. Right now, it's farewell."

Her green eyes smoldered with fires of love and wonder, of to-day and eternity.

"You know where we go?"

"Yes, angel. Once before I traveled through space and passed a golden star beyond Ursa Major. It is a middle-aged sun and it has planets. If there is any haven in the universe, it will be there. If we can't live on a satellite of Tau 231, we'll keep on till we do find a place to live.

"Ready?"

It was doubtful if Ellayn understood much or any of what he said. For answer, she lifted her face to his, and a deeply felt caress marked journey's end and journey's beginning.

Web slowly pulled himself away. He pointed the *Ellen* up.

Farewell to earth. He threw the controls, and the cosmocraft winged skyward.

Mountain Of Light!

THE KOHINOOR (or "Mountain of Light") diamond is one of the largest diamonds in the world. It is a stone of the finest water about half the size of an egg. Its worth is estimated at about three and a half million dollars. It is set in an armlet with a diamond the size of a bird's egg on either side of it.

TERROR



I KNOW the thing's dangerous," said Terry Webb. "Your father warned me of that. I went into it with my eyes open."

Terry Webb was sitting on the front seat of the big, rather ancient sedan, beside the girl at the wheel. Terry was lean, tall, twenty-four. He had stiff red hair that refused to lie brushed in any particular direction, pink skin that tended to freckle, bright, enthusiastic blue

eyes that had little dare-devil greenish glints. Terry was star reporter of the *Tyburn Telegram*, but on that gray afternoon he was on stranger business than news gathering.

"Maybe he did," said Eve Audrin. "But it's *more* dangerous than you know. Dad's so' wrapped up in the

OUT OF TIME

by Jack Williamson

*Minds Are Traded, Bodies Stolen,
in the Thunder of Vast Machinery*

thing he doesn't think of the danger. But the thing is horrid—dreadful!”

Into her soft tones had crept a husky note of fear.

“I said I'd do it,” Terry Webb insisted. “I guess I can see it through.”

He turned in the seat to look at Eve. In the gray, dying twilight, her smooth face was very white, very earnest. Her brown eyes glanced at him a moment from the road. They were warm with concern, and he saw in them the shadow of haunting dread.

With a little anxious catch in it, her soft, rich voice appealed:

“Oh, Terry, you—*mustn't!*”

Eve Audrin was lovely. Infinitely desirable, infinitely precious. Her hair, fine and wavy and dark, was fragrantly close to his face. Her brown eyes, the warmth of her soft voice brought a half-painful constriction to his throat. Her white bare arm, so smoothly rounded, touched him unconsciously as she swung the big wheel.

And resolution hardened in him.

“I must, Eve!” he whispered. “I can't give it up. It means giving you up. And I care—too much—”

Her dark eyes looked at him quickly. They had a warmth in them. A gladness. And, still, a dark shadow of dread.

“I wish—”

Her voice formed the words, and

died. Her brown eyes were staring into the low hills ahead, the desolate hills that lie west of Tyburn; they were shadows of purple gloom under the blood-red sunset. She shuddered a little.

“Wish what, Eve?” he asked her.

Still staring, with dread in her eyes, at the dark hills before them, she spoke swiftly in a tone that was almost fierce.

“I wish dad weren't so set on carrying out the horrid experiment. Or, anyhow, that he hadn't set his mind on making a martyr out of you. I promised mother, when she was dying, that I wouldn't marry without dad's consent. But that doesn't give him the right to use me this way, to buy a victim—”

“Don't put it that way!” Terry protested. “You talk as if I'd volunteered to have my head cut off!” He laughed at her. “And I've already promised. Of course, I *did* do it partly to encourage him to give us his blessing. But the thing is really very interesting, Eve! Tremendous! If we can look through the veil of time—”

He stopped, as his mind flashed back to the occasion when Doctor Audrin had first spoken of the amazing experiment. It was one evening when he was waiting in the big, shadowy old house in Tyburn for Eve to come down. With a nervous manner, Doctor Audrin called

him into the gloomy old library, shut the door.

Doctor Audrin was a slight, frail little man, with a thin fringe of white hair and pale eyes that burned with a strange enthusiasm—with the dominating fire of a single great idea. His manner was restless, jerky; his voice high, eager. He was at that time the head of the department of psychology in Tyburn College.

"Mr. Webb," he began, "did you ever wonder about the end of the world?"

"Eh?" said Terry, astonished. "Why, yes, I suppose so."

"The future, I mean," the little man amplified, with quick, nervous sentences. "Human history. Through the millions of years to come. The battle to exist. The final struggle with the cold. When the sun goes out. The end!"

"Yes, I've wondered," admitted Terry, rather anxious to know what the little man was leading up to.

Doctor Audrin came up to him, took his arm with a thin, shaking hand, and peered very earnestly into his face with pale eyes.

"I've found a way, Mr. Webb," he whispered, "to—see!"

"You don't mean," said Terry, incredulous, "that you've done it?"

"Not yet," said the little man. "I must have a subject. And there is a certain—risk. Not great, now, I'm sure. My apparatus is improved. But, in my first trial, my subject was—injured. I've been wondering, Mr. Webb, if you—"

"You want me, you mean, to help?"

"Yes, Mr. Webb. That's it." The voice seemed relieved. "My daughter told me not to ask you. But I thought— If you would offer to be my subject, Mr. Webb—"

"Wait. a minute, please," said Terry. "I'd like to know exactly

what it is you're trying to get me into."

"You see, Mr. Webb," the little scientist explained nervously, "I've discovered a current, a force—the thing is hard to state except in mathematical language—that enables me to warp space-time along the time dimension.

"That may not mean much to you. But the discovery holds vast possibilities. Tremendous possibilities, Mr. Webb! In brief, it enables me to bring the brain of my subject, in the present time, into very intimate contact with the brain of some other human being, perhaps a million years distant in time, or a hundred million! They are brought together, so to speak, by bending the time dimension.

"In such contact, Mr. Webb, the brains affect each other. *Neuro-induction* I call the phenomenon. Thought is transferred from one brain to the other.

"In brief, it enables my subject in the present to pick up sensations from some brain in the future. It is just as if my subject lived for a space in the body of the other being. At the termination of the experiment, he will be able to give a report of his sensations. He will have a memory of life in the far future!"

"It sounds," whispered Terry, "marvelous—if you can do it!"

"It is a marvelous thing. Tremendous, Mr. Webb! And it can be done, if you will offer yourself. Why, you may pick up the thoughts of some historian of the future, as he writes! Or of some new Shakespeare! You may pick up the memories of some scientist who knows secrets we never dream of! You may live in the body of some Alexander or Napoleon of the future!

"Or it's possible, Mr. Webb"—and Terry detected a note almost of

fanaticism in the high voice—"that you will make contact with the brain of the last man, and witness the end of human history. Yes, that's possible, Mr. Webb, if I use the full power of the apparatus!"

The white, shrunken hand trembled, tightened on Terry's arm. An appeal came into the quick, high voice.

"If you should offer, Mr. Webb, to be my subject——"

SO EVE AUDRIN came upon them, slim and cool and lovely in a rose-hued evening dress.

"Dad," her soft voice called reprovingly, "are you talking to Terry about your horrid experiment? I told you not to do it! Don't listen to him, Terry. He's daft about it. And he wants you for a victim."

And she insisted that Terry come away, before her father could say more. But on other occasions the eager little man talked again of his tremendous idea, until Terry was infected with some reflection of his enthusiasm to look into the future.

Eve protested strongly. She inspired Terry with a fear of the thing that cooled his enthusiasm. The first trial *had* been strangely disastrous. But at last, when he realized that he must do it to keep in the good graces of the little scientist, he had promised.

Eve was driving Terry now to the secret laboratory in the hills, fitted up inside an unused barn on an abandoned farmstead, where Doctor Audrin was waiting to begin the experiment with time.

"I'm afraid, Terry," the girl whispered again. "Afraid! You and dad make it sound so innocent and harmless. But it isn't!"

"Why not?" And Terry looked at her white, fear-haunted face.

"Dad lays you on a glass slab,"

she said. "He turns his ray on you. It tears out your mind—your soul—and sends it forward into time. Dad puts it into different words, with all his mathematics and psychology. But that's what happens. Your mind is torn out and sent into another body, in the future. And your body is left on the slab, vacant—well, just the same as dead!"

She shuddered a little, then asked him:

"You know what really happened to the other subject?"

"There was some injury to the brain, your father said."

"I know. That's what he makes himself believe. Because what really happened is too—terrible!"

"Well, what did happen?"

"The man was a mechanic. Carl Jensen was his name. His mind was torn out with the magnetic current and sent forward into time. And it never came back!"

"What do you mean?" He was startled, a little terrified.

"His mind didn't come back," the girl repeated. "His body lay vacant on the slab. And something else came into it, out of time. A—a horrible thing! It took his vacant body, while he was out of it!"

"How do you know, Eve?" Terry asked her apprehensively.

"When he woke on the slab, he wasn't himself!" She shuddered. "He was a—a monster! He glared around him, mouthing strange sounds, like—like an unknown language. And he tried to attack me!"

Terry Webb was silent, quivering to a little thrill of dread.

"He's still in the asylum," the girl whispered. "They keep him in a padded cell. Dad and I saw him. It was—fearful. He glared at us, and screamed sounds that were like words of a strange language! The regents heard something about it."

That was why they told dad to abandon the experiment. And I wish he had!"

She drove a little while in silence toward the lonely laboratory in the low, dark hills ahead. In the gray light, her lovely face was very sober, very pale, drawn with haunting, terrible dread.

"So you see, Terry," she breathed at last, "why you mustn't!"

"But I'm going to," said Terry. "I love you so much, Eve, that I've simply got to!"

He smiled at her, and the little, reckless, greenish glints were brighter in his blue eyes.

"Oh, Terry!" she whispered. Her voice stopped with a little choke. He saw that she was biting her lip to keep from sobbing. Tears came in her brown eyes; she shook them out angrily and drove faster.

She stopped the car presently with the headlights shining on the dark wall of the old barn, a vast, gloomy structure, leaning a little. She stopped the engine, and the silence of the lonely, long-deserted valley closed about them like a mantle of death.

Doctor Audrin was waiting for them at the door of the barn. A slight, thin man, nervous, consumed with eagerness.

"Just come in, Mr. Webb," his high voice greeted them. "I've everything ready."

All the partitions had been removed from the barn; it was an enormous, oblong box, twenty feet high. The glare of naked lights failed to drive the gloom from the corners. In one end of the room a little gasoline engine was throbbing, driving the dynamo that fed the lights and the strangely looming apparatus.

Doctor Audrin removed a heavy blue cover from an oblong, coffinlike object. It proved to be a massive

slab of heavy glass, three feet by eight. Strange brass mechanisms glistened about it. Above was a great silvery reflector, holding an odd, strangely twisted tube.

"Please strip to the waist," requested the little scientist, "and lie with your head just here, between these coils."

Terry obeyed deliberately, as Eve Audrin made her final plea:

"Don't you realize, dad, that it's dangerous? Something, some horrid thing, may steal his body while he's gone into time!"

"Daughter," reproved the eager little man, "you have wrong impressions about the nature of our experiment. A mind is simply a pattern of synaptic configurations, a function of the brain. A mind can't exist outside a brain. *Neuro-induction* is a physical process, by which one brain induces synaptic changes in another. It is gradual."

"That's just a different way of saying it," the girl challenged. "It doesn't change the fact that you're sending off Terry's mind—and that some other dreadful mind may steal his body while he's gone!"

"It's true," her father admitted, "that there seemed to be a complete transfer of synaptic patterns in the case of our first experiment. We shall not leave Mr. Webb so long under the ray. An hour will be sufficient. But your language, daughter, is very unscientific."

"Oh, don't!" cried Eve. "Terry, don't let him do it!"

"Daughter, control yourself!" reproved Doctor Audrin.

Terry himself was filled with a slow sickness of fear. But he set his jaw, grimly resolving to see the thing through, for Eve's sake. He had been, he reflected, in tight corners before. Quietly, he took his place on the huge slab of glass, with

the gleaming coils beside his head, the great electron tube in its reflector above.

Nervously eager, Doctor Audrin asked: "Ready, Mr. Webb?"

"Ready," Terry assented briefly. Eve stood by him. He grasped her hand, until her father motioned her back.

"Come back, Terry," her soft voice whispered, strained, husky. "Come back to me! You *must* come back."

"Don't you worry, Eve," he said. "I'll come——"

Doctor Audrin threw a switch. Intense, uncanny scarlet rays poured down from the reflector upon Terry's head. They were like a rain of blood. They made his face look livid and terrible. Eve cried out, then stood silent, trembling, biting her lip.

The little scientist moved another lever. And something happened to the red rays. They seemed caught in a vortex. They thickened, swirled. They seemed to clot into a bloody mist. They became a spinning funnel that poured into Terry's head!

His body quivered a little, seemed to stiffen. He lay motionless under the inverted cone of scarlet rays, whose point bored into his head.

Outside, it was silent night. Gloom hung in the corners of the huge room. The little gasoline engine throbbed steadily; the dynamo whirred; from some coil in the apparatus came a keen, monotonous buzz.

Terry Webb lay under the terrible rays, rigid as a dead man.

EVE AUDRIN watched him, breathless. She had bit through her lip. Below it, blood made a little bright streak across her pale skin. She kept her white hands clenched

at her sides. Sometimes she breathed audibly, with a long, sobbing gasp. Her anxious, terror-shadowed brown eyes hardly left the body under the clotted scarlet light.

Doctor Audrin moved restlessly about the room. Now and then he made some adjustment to the apparatus, or entered some brief notation on a scrap of paper, or looked at his watch. His pale, burning eyes, like Eve's, always came back to the deathlike, red-lit body.

"How long?" Eve whispered once. And when he did not hear: "How long has it been, father?"

"Eh? Oh, only nine minutes. It lacks fifty-one of the hour. Control yourself, daughter."

She did not speak again, but sometimes Doctor Audrin jerked out a restless little sentence:

"Strange things he may be seeing, daughter. The end of the world! He may see it. I'm using full power."

The hour, at last, was mercifully ended. Doctor Audrin shut off the sinister crimson rays. Eve darted eagerly forward toward Terry's rigid form. His face was drawn, bloodless. He seemed hardly to breathe. She touched his forehead, and he seemed to wake, though still heavy, dazed.

His eyes opened, looked up at her. There was a strangeness in them. A dull horror. But recognition was in them. They were very tired, heavy with strange sleep.

"Eve," he whispered, as if with an effort.

She laughed sobbingly.

"Mr. Webb!" It was her father's thin voice, tremulously eager. "Tell me, Mr. Webb, what were your sensations?"

"I'm tired," whispered Terry. "I've never been so tired. Let me sleep."

It was a dead, forced whisper.

"Tell me!" insisted Doctor Audrin. "Have you been into time?"

"Yes," came the weary whisper. "I've been in the future. It seems that I was a scientist. He lived at—the end! The end of all the life we know. It was forty million years ahead. The sun had gone out!"

The lifeless whisper died. Doctor Audrin said imperatively: "Go on!"

"My name was Gorkon. Gorkon was not a man. He was a Martian. He was the last of the Martian invaders. They had ruled humanity for half a million years.

"Gorkon lived in a deep valley. A craterlike pit with black, sheer walls. It was where the Pacific is now. He ruled the last tribe of men. Little white, furry things, degenerated until they were no more than beasts.

"The sun had gone out. The valley was bitterly cold. It was warmed and illuminated only by a great globe of atomic fire, on a tower above Gorkon's dwelling. A globe of golden flame.

"Gorkon and the man-things who were his slaves were fighting for existence. They were fighting against a strange new life that had sprung up on the frozen planet. Against shapeless, creeping things of blue, frozen mist that fought with strange rays of cold.

"Gorkon and his human slaves were defeated. The blue creatures—the Ku-Latha, Gorkon called them—broke through the guarded pass and came into the valley.

"The last men and the last Martian are doomed to die together before the conquerors of cold."

The dead whisper died, and Terry sank back upon the slab. They could not wake him again. His face was lividly pale; his pulse was slow; his breathing irregular and slight.

"It's a strange sleep," whispered Eve. "Abnormal! He looks just like he did under the ray. I'm afraid, dad"—and she shuddered—"afraid that the change is still going on. His mind is still going out! And some other coming in! He was—changed!"

"Nonsense, daughter!" protested the little man. "That's impossible, since I've broken the contact."

"But," she insisted, her voice low with dread, "suppose some scientist wanted to come back? Like that—that Gorkon! He could bridge the gap!" She shuddered.

"Nonsense, daughter," said Doctor Audrin again. "Control your fears."

But Terry still would not wake. They carried him into the old farmhouse by the barn, where Doctor Audrin had established temporary living quarters. They put him to bed, still sleeping. Eve sat in a chair by his bed to watch.

She wanted her father to go for medical aid. But he insisted that it was merely a natural fatigue, due to the ray, that would wear off. And he did not wish to risk the chance that the experiment would become public. He watched with her a while, and presently retired, confident that Terry would soon awake normally.

Hours dragged by as Eve watched. Terry slept on in the strange trance. Exhausted, toward dawn, the girl caught herself dozing, starting awake. Once, when she woke, Terry was gone. He had slipped away without disturbing her.

Alarmed, terrified, she roused her father to help her search. The lights, they soon discovered, were on in the laboratory. They entered, surprised Terry busy at a workbench in the end of the room.

His hands were moving with a strange new cunning. Beside him

on the bench were three or four little devices that he had already finished—enigmatic things, whose purpose neither Eve nor her father understood.

Terry started when he heard them. He looked at them with an expression that was not natural on Terry's face. Craft was in it, and power. And malefic triumph. That look sickened Eve with fear and horror.

Terry moved quickly. He touched some little device that evidently he had constructed at the bench and had already fastened to his wrist.

His body shimmered, grew mistily transparent, vanished.

He had become invisible!

His voice spoke to them out of apparently empty air:

"What do you want?"

It had an unfamiliar ring, harsh, cruel, brazen.

"Terry——" called Eve, with a sobbing catch in her voice. "Terry!"

"I am not the person you knew as Terry Webb," spoke back the amazing voice from the void. "Though I do have, however, the use of his body and his memory."

A ghastly, triumphant chuckle came out of emptiness.

"You are—*something*," gasped the horrified girl, "in his body?"

"I am Gorkon, the last Martian. My body, in the future, is doomed to die before the conquerors of cold. Since the means were so conveniently provided, I have come back to continue existence in the body of Terry Webb."

"Terry?" breathed the shuddering girl. "Where is Terry?"

"There are three brains concerned in this interchange, instead of two," said the dreadful voice. "The mind of Terry Webb is being transferred into one of the last men. A small, furry creature that very soon will die."

The girl cried out as if with pain. "This is outrageous——" began the thin voice of Doctor Audrin.

He had started forward, when an unseen hand picked up one of the little devices on the bench, which instantly vanished also. A green ray flickered toward him, out of emptiness. Eve smelled the sharp odor of ozone, heard a crackle like electricity. Her father fell on his face, gasping with agony, stunned.

She heard the horrible chuckle again, mockingly triumphant, unlike the genial laugh of Terry Webb. And heard footsteps coming toward her, across the concrete floor. She reeled with shuddering horror as her arm was roughly seized by a hand she could not see——

"DON'T YOU WORRY, Eve," Terry Webb was saying, as he lay upon the slab of glass. "I'll come back——"

Then red light blazed down, and he was no longer in the laboratory. There was an instant of unendurable sickness and such confusion as he had never known. All sense of direction, position, and time went from him. Then, abruptly, he was no longer Terry Webb.

He was Ato Lu.

Ato Lu was a slender, four-limbed creature, less than five feet high. He was manlike; he walked erect. But his body, even his face and the backs of his hands, was covered with short white fur.

Terry thought the thoughts of Ato Lu, felt the sensations of the little furry man. At first he had no memory that he was Terry Webb. Memory came to him slowly as time passed. But at first all he knew was confined to the limited mental world of Ato Lu, whose thoughts were slow and dim.

Ato Lu had always lived in the

crater valley that was rimmed with a wall of towering black mountains. The black pit was the only world he knew, save for vague, terrified whisperings of the Outside, and of the Ku-Latha, the dread, dimly known horrors that haunted it.

Always he had lived and toiled in the valley with the little tribe of Gorkon's human slaves that were the last of humanity.

Gorkon he had feared and hated from the day when his mother had first pointed him out, from the caves where the tribe lived, in the low cliffs by the narrow salt lake.

Gorkon was nearly twice as tall as a man. His body was hairless and black with an oily, glistening blackness. His features were thin and cruel, with a long nose that was sharply hooked, and eyes that were yellow, triangular, terrible. He always wore robes of scarlet, and carried his long, pitiless whip.

Gorkon did not dwell with the tribe in the caves. His dwelling was a dome of white metal upon the low, solitary mountain that rose beside the dwindling lake in the center of the valley. Above the silver dome burned the golden globe of the atomic flame.

The last of the Martians, Gorkon lived alone in his metal dome in a strange splendor that the tribe whispered of. He took women of the tribe there, for personal slaves. So he had taken Ato Lu's mother. And she had come back, broken with toil and the merciless torture of the whip, to die in the miserable cave.

Ato Lu hated Gorkon for that. But he feared him more, as all the tribe feared him.

All his life, Ato Lu had toiled in the narrow fields about the lake, where grew the pitifully scant crops of edible mosses and lichens, in the dwindling radiance of the golden

atomic flame. Gorkon took away most of the crops. And when the harvest was small, he killed some member of the tribe with the torture of the whip. So had died the father of Ato Lu.

Ato Lu hated the gigantic black Martian. But half a million years of slavery to the pitiless invaders from Mars had bred out the last trace of revolt. Timid, frightened, Ato Lu had accepted the death of his mother, the torture of his father, as things inevitable and not to be opposed. He would have died himself at the whip without thinking to raise a hand against the Martian.

Now Ato Lu was fighting, with the pitiful remnant of the tribe, to defend the pass that alone gave entrance to the valley.

No more than a dozen white, furry creatures, ill with hunger and trembling with cold—but all that remained of the human race. Six men, Ato Lu the youngest of them. Five women, one with a whimpering baby clinging to her furry breasts.

Gorkon had driven them out of the caves, given them flame guns, driven them here to meet the invaders. Nearly a hundred of the tribe, there had been then. All but the dozen had died in the pass, driven to the battle by the whip of Gorkon, who remained in the rear, taking no risk.

Ato Lu was crouching with the others behind the ancient stone wall that had guarded the valley since the first memory of the tribe. They had a tiny fire of moss, but the thin air was bleakly cold; they all were shivering.

The sky was black. It glittered with cold, diamond stars that had not gone out in human memory. The dead sun hung in it, a black disk, enormous, blotting out the stars.

Behind them, the mountain walls

of the defile opened out, marched around the valley. The golden sphere of the atomic flame burned on its tower above the silver dome of Gorkon on the low central hill.

Beyond the ancient, crumbling wall, from the dimly known, terrible Outside, came the attacking invaders. The Ku-Latha!

Creeping meekly to obey the order of Gorkon, who stood with his whip safely behind the wall, Ato Lu climbed the crumbling steps to his post. He trembled, half with the chill of the bitter wind, half with terror of the invaders.

Above him was the frozen, star-shot dome of eternal night. The black sun hung unmoving at the zenith, visible only by the stars it blotted out. The defile widened beyond the wall. On the starlit floor of it, he saw the invading myriads.

THE KU-LATHA! The new life, born of the cold. They were not things of flesh and blood and bone, that could freeze with the freezing planet. They were things of vapor. Shapeless, changing masses of blue mist, faintly luminous.

In numberless hosts they crept about on the black floor of the defile, entities of crawling horror, dread spawn of eternal cold.

Time and again the tribe had driven them back with the flame guns, whose white, incandescent jets destroyed the gaseous matter of their bodies. But they returned, almost more numerous, implacable.

This time they had brought weapons. Slender black tubes, held in the strange, shapeless limbs that they could form at will from the stuff of their formless bodies, that projected a force of cold. The very air froze to glittering white flakes in the path of this cold ray. Any human being that it touched stiffened

instantly into a statue rimed with gleaming frost.

Behind the wall was a little whimpering cry. Ato Lu looked down. He saw Gorkon, black, red-robed, gigantic. He had whipped the woman with the child away from the fire. He stood over it, while she hunted the tiny fragments of dry moss they used for fuel.

The woman was Ona Va. She was Ato Lu's sister. He pitied her and the whimpering child. And he hated Gorkon. But he did not think to turn his flame gun on the hairless giant. No man had rebelled against the Martians for a hundred thousand years.

Gorkon's brazen voice boomed an order at him; the whip cracked angrily. Obediently, Ato Lu turned the bright cylinder of his flame gun.

The Ku-Latha were again moving up the defile under the changeless, pitiless stars. Thousands of masses of cold blue vapor, amorphous, hideous, creeping. Their formless limbs held black weapons. Presently the fight began.

The shivering, furry men on the old wall shot white, stabbing jets of hissing flame. When the incandescent needles touched them, the gaseous monsters slumped, wilted, disintegrated.

But the invaders turned their rays of cold upon the wall. Air congealed into white flakes that glittered in the starlight. The stones of the old wall cracked apart explosively from the contraction of terrible cold. One by one, the defenders became motionless statues, so cold that they shattered like glass when they fell.

There were numberless thousands of the dimly shining blue masses. And—at the beginning of the encounter—eleven of the furry men.

Gorkon did not come upon the wall. But he drove all the tribe up

the crumbling steps. Ona Va, Ato Lu's sister, came last of all, before the whip, her crying child in one arm, a flame gun in the other hand.

Like a terrible wave of blue, the formless invaders came up the dark canyon. Crystals of frozen air swirled about the defenders from the invisible rays. Ona Va fell with her child at the feet of Ato Lu, their furry bodies frozen hard as stone.

The white, hissing needle from Ato Lu's flame gun stabbed back to meet the wave of blue, frozen horror that poured resistlessly up the dark valley. And the battle went on. Three men and a woman were left beside Ato Lu. Two men— One man—

Ato Lu was alone.

The last man.

He was afraid. Ages of slavery had not bred fighters. But the black Martian would not let him leave the wall. He used his flame gun. And at last the Ku-Latha, already breaking, fell back.

But he knew they would attack again. They always did. They were numberless. And next time they would take the wall.

The little furry man looked down at Gorkon, shivering. He wanted to come down to the fire, dared not, unless Gorkon should bid him.

He saw that Gorkon was staring up at him. Black, gigantic, hairless, muffled in thick robes of scarlet. His face was an evil leer. His eyes were yellow and sunken and terrible. The long whip was in his ebon hand.

Harshly, the brazen voice boomed out a strange question:

"Who are you?"

"Terry Webb—"

Ato Lu did not understand the syllables that had rushed to his lips. He stopped with a gasp, said: "Oh! Gorkon, you must know that I am Ato Lu!"

Yet there was a doubt, an uncertainty, in his tone. He had the faintest shadow of a memory that he was not Ato Lu alone, but also, incomprehensibly, some one else named Terry Webb.

Gorkon's eyes—yellow, huge, and strangely triangular—stared up at him. He boomed again:

"You have a memory that you are other than Ato Lu?"

"Gorkon," he answered slowly, "it seems that I do. Do not whip me for it! I did not mean—"

A red glare of triumph had come into the great amber eyes.

"Stay and guard the wall, Ato Lu," the terrible voice commanded. "My whip will cut the last shred of flesh from your bones if you fail."

The red-robed Martian touched his girdle to move a little stud. A faintly luminous shell at once surrounded his body. He rose and floated swiftly away, as if in defiance of gravitation, toward the silver dome in the center of the valley.

Ato Lu remained upon the wall for a little time, shivering. He was trying in his dim, slow way to understand the memory that was growing ever stronger, that he was not only Ato Lu, but also Terry Webb.

Then the Ku-Latha came again to the attack. Blue, formless, gaseous things. They were like small, detached clouds, crawling along the dark ground. They bore terrible death by cold.

Ato Lu did not wait for them. He feared them more than he did the memory of Gorkon's whip. He fled, carrying his flame gun. Yet, as he fled, he had the strange feeling that the other being, waking in him, was not afraid. Terry Webb, he felt, did not want to run.

He left the wall, ran down the defile into the black, star-roofed crater. Beyond the half-frozen salt lake, be-

yond the pitiful fields, rose the inner peak, crowned with Gorkon's silver dome, and with the golden globe of the atomic flame burning above it.

The Ku-Latha followed him, an implacable wave of cold blue death.

Panting, he came to the caves by the shore of the lake and lay down to rest by a tiny fire of moss in the cave that had been his sister's.

Ato Lu slept on his bed of moss. A little furry man, uneasy with hunger, shivering with the nip of eternal cold. And he had a strange dream.

He dreamed that he was no longer Ato Lu. He was Terry Webb. And Terry Webb had no body. He was floating in a black void that was featureless save for tiny, drifting points of enigmatic green.

He was Terry Webb, he dreamed. And Gorkon had stolen his body. And, in his body, Gorkon had taken the girl he loved. Terry Webb, somehow, was fighting desperately to recover his body and the girl.

In the dark abyss, among the floating sparks of green, he demanded of Gorkon:

"Give back my body! Give back Eve Audrin, whom you have taken with my body!"

The voice of Gorkon seemed to come to him in the void:

"This body is mine forever. The body of Gorkon lies in the dome by the lake. But the mind of Gorkon is waking in the body of Terry Webb. The mind of Terry Webb is waking in the body of the slave, Ato Lu. It will die when Ato Lu dies. And Ato Lu will soon die, for the creatures of cold will come into the cave."

"It may be that Ato Lu will die," answered Terry Webb, in the dark emptiness. "But, before he dies, he will kill you, Gorkon. Or I will, with his body."

A note of fear, it seemed, was in the reply of Gorkon, though mocking contempt covered it.

"Ato Lu kill Gorkon?" It was a jeer and a taunt. "Ato Lu is a little man. Gorkon is a giant. And Ato Lu is a coward."

"So," said Terry Webb, "is Gorkon."

"And the Ku-Latha have taken the valley," came the mocking response. "Ato Lu could not pass them to reach Gorkon."

"He could try."

"The silver dome is a fortress. The door is barred. He could never enter."

"But," insisted Terry, "*he could try.*"

"Even if he did enter," responded the taunt of Gorkon, "he is a very small coward, and I am a Martian warrior. I can wake and destroy him."

"We shall see," said Terry Webb.

"Very soon now," resumed the mocking voice, "you may destroy the body under the dome, and welcome. The transfer of my mind to the body of Terry Webb is already far progressed. A little time more, and I have no longer need of the black body under the dome."

Mocking laughter came up through the green-shot blackness. And a final taunt:

"Gorkon gives you thanks, Terry Webb, for the gift of so fair a woman with your body. One who already has learned to love it!"

THE DREAM ended. Ato Lu came up out of the dark, green-flecked void. He woke, trembling, by the smoldering fire of moss.

But the memory of Terry Webb was strong, now—as strong as the memory of Ato Lu. He was two beings in one. His body was the body of Ato Lu. He had Ato Lu's hatred

of Gorkon, Ato Lu's fear of Gorkon and of the Ku-Latha. But he had also a burning love for Eve Audrin. And a coldly desperate determination to destroy the body of Gorkon, so that the Martian's mind, not yet completely transferred, could not hold forever the body it had stolen.

Both parts of him had reason enough to kill the big Martian. But Ato Lu's fears, his habit of timid obedience, were terrible obstacles.

There was a silent battle in the little furry man. A dozen times he crept to the opening of the cave. But when he looked out upon the creeping, gaseous shapes of the Ku-Latha all over the floor of the valley, he cowered back in terror to his little fire.

Yet the part of him that was Terry Webb became ever stronger—the mind of Terry Webb, if one may put it so, was flowing steadily into his furry body, as the mind of Gorkon was flowing from the body under the dome into the body of Terry Webb.

So the last man at length found courage to come into the open. He stood, faint with cold and hunger, on the salt-crusted beach of the icy lake. Across the lake stood the mountain, with the white dome of Gorkon's house upon it.

The golden globe of the atomic flame was burning on its tower above the dome when he first stepped out. But the beings of cold had made some attack upon it with their rays. White swirls of frozen air danced suddenly about it. It flickered, went out!

Final night descended on the valley.

It was a pit, walled with black mountains. The black sky domed it, immutable, glittering with frosty stars. Creeping over the floor of it were the Ku-Latha—formless, crawling clouds of blue gas.

With the atomic light extinct, the thin air grew swiftly colder. Life, human life, would not long be possible on the earth.

Ato Lu, the last man, began running around the salt-crusted shore of the freezing lake toward the dark bulk of the starlit mountain. He was sick with terror of the amorphous, gaseous creatures that came behind him. But the part of him that was Terry Webb would not let him stop.

He still carried the small bright cylinder of his flame gun.

He reached the road that led up from the lake toward the silver dome. His furry body was numb and quivering with the increasing cold. The air seared his panting lungs. Ato Lu wanted to lie down and give himself up to death. But Terry Webb made him go on.

He had thought himself ahead of all the Ku-Latha. But one of them came suddenly into view upon the road before him, cutting him off. One of its formless limbs carried a black weapon of cold. It saw him, used the weapon. A rock beside him shattered explosively; an icy blast shook him.

The furry man flung himself flat, deliberately used his flame gun. It was a difficult shot. But presently the hissing white needle stabbed into the blue cloud; it disintegrated.

Terry Webb—he was dominant now in the furry man—ran on. He had been victorious. But he was colder. He had used half the reserve of power in the flame gun. He had been delayed, when time was the vital element. All about the base of the mountain the Ku-Latha were closing in. Blue, formless, weirdly luminous; a tide of frozen death.

Terry came to the dome. It was a huge structure of polished, silvery metal. It had no windows, but one door. The door was locked. He

beat upon it with small, furry fists that were numb with cold.

The blue, amorphous things were following up the mountain.

Ato Lu was sick with fear. Even Terry Webb in him was numb with bleak despair. But the mind of Terry Webb, he knew, would not give up until it was dead.

It was Terry Webb that suggested that the flame gun might serve as a cutting torch. The little furry man turned the hissing white needle against the silvery metal. It glowed and spattered; a little incandescent furrow was cut in it.

Deliberately he set out to cut through the door. He was numb, nearly dead with cold. The bitter air was an agony in his lungs. His furry skin was stiff, like armor. His lifeless fingers could hardly hold the flame gun.

He had cut away, at last, a section of the outer shell. The massive bolt was laid bare beyond it. He attacked it with the white flame, weaker now, as the fuel was running low.

Behind him, the Ku-Latha were marching steadily up the hill.

He reeled, staggered. He was forced to prop himself against the metal, to keep from falling. He was giddy. Cold made him half blind. Tears froze on his eyelashes. The diminishing bright jet of flame was all he could see. That began to spin and whirl.

He had exposed the bolt, cut almost through it. The white jet of flame flickered suddenly. It went out, with a little explosive sound. He flung his freezing body against the door. It would not open. The forms of the Ku-Latha were near.

He staggered away from the door, found a stone. He lifted it, reeling under the weight of it, hammered on the bolt. It snapped at his deep cut. The door swung open.

AST-9

The little furry man, dying with the agony of frozen lungs, staggered into the Martian's dwelling. He carried the stone and the empty flame gun.

He had no thought for the strange luxury of it, that had been whispered of in the caves. He was too blind to see the wondrous fountains of colored light, the strangely gorgeous hangings. His feet were too dead with cold to feel the deep piles of the splendid carpets. The warm, perfumed air only increased the agony of his frozen lungs.

In an inner room he found Gorkon. The chamber glowed with rosy light. On a couch of blue, soft stuff the Martian lay, a great black giant, crimson-robed, motionless.

Even in this extremity, Terry Webb would not strike an unwarned man. He stopped in the door and made some gasping sound—his voice was gone.

Gorkon woke and stood up. A gigantic, menacing figure, black, red-clad. His eyes were yellow and triangular and terrible. He snatched some weapon as he rose. Green light flickered at the furry man; red agony paralyzed his arm.

But the little man had flung the bright, empty cylinder of his flame gun. Whirling end over end, it struck Gorkon's weapon, knocked it beyond the blue couch.

An angry bellowing sound came from the black giant. He picked up his whip, lunged forward. The lash cut through furry skin to the bone; it flicked drops of scarlet.

Ato Lu rushed at him, in the face of the whip. His sound hand lifted the rock. It was a single thought that kept him alive, throbbing like an engine in his brain—to kill Gorkon.

The Martian, for an instant, was confounded. No man in a hundred

thousand years had dared to revolt. Fear flickered in the yellow eyes. The black hand dropped the whip.

And the stone came with a dull, fatal impact against the huge, hairless black skull of Gorkon. He staggered silently back, and lay motionless under the rosy light, half upon the blue couch and half upon the rugs.

Ata Lu fell upon him, and lifted the stone again, and died before he had struck.

And so the invading Ku-Latha presently found them, the last man and the last warrior from Mars, lying dead beneath the rosy light. And the conquerors of cold were masters of the planet—

INVISIBLE FEET grated toward Eve Audrin upon the concrete floor of the laboratory. She shuddered at the touch of unseen hands upon her body. But they were torn away abruptly; the unseen form fell against her, collapsed upon her feet.

She heard a gasp. And then, suddenly, sitting before her on the gray concrete, was Terry Webb. His face was worn and haggard, his stiff red hair all tangled. He was still stripped to the waist, as he had been when the experiment began. But he looked at her, wan though he was, with his old familiar grin.

"Hello, Eve," he said.

And he began to unfasten an odd little device that was fastened to his wrist.

She was kneeling beside him in an instant, trembling with incredulous joy.

"Terry?" she gasped. "It's you? Really you?"

"In person!" he assured her, with his weary grin. "And permanently! There aren't going to be any more uninvited tenants. I'm going to stay at home in my own body, after this. I promise you! Because look who I have to stay at home with!"

Still smiling wanly, he patted her hand on his shoulder.

"That horrid thing?" she breathed. "Gorkon?"

"Gorkon is dead," he told her. "Back in his own body, and dead for keeps! Let's look after your father. I think, though, that the green ray merely stunned him."

And that, they found, was true. The nervous little scientist was soon himself again, uninjured save for a long blistered area on his upper arm.

DOCTOR AUDRIN was—and still is—vastly curious about the adventure of Terry Webb in the far future. He knows that Terry emerged from that weird tangle of brains with his own identity intact, and with a good share of the memories of the last man and of the vast knowledge of Gorkon, the Martian scientist. But Terry is oddly reticent about what he remembers. And Doctor Audrin has a strange fear of him, since he was Gorkon. He has never dared to ask Terry outright what he remembers. And Terry has never told him.

And the little man consented very hastily when Terry asked him for the hand of Eve.



The Demon of the Flower

by Clark Ashton Smith

NOT AS the plants and flowers of earth, growing peacefully beneath a simple sun, were the blossoms of the planet Lophai. Coiling and uncoiling in double dawns; tossing tumultuously under vast suns of jade green and balasruby orange; swaying and weltering in rich twilights, in aurora-curtained

nights, they resembled fields of rooted serpents that dance eternally to an other-world music.

Many were small and furtive, and crept viperwise on the ground. Others were tall as pythons, rearing superbly in hieratic postures to the jeweled light. Some grew with single or dual stems that burgeoned

forth into hydra heads. And some were frilled and festooned with leaves that suggested the wings of flying lizards, the pennants of faery lances, the phylacteries of a strange sacerdotalism. Some appeared to bear the scarlet wattles of dragons; others were tongued as if with black flames or the colored vapors that issue with weird writhings from out barbaric censers; and others still were armed with fleshy nets of tendrils, or with huge blossoms like bucklers perforated in battle. And all were equipped with venomous darts and fangs; all were alive, restless, and sentient.

They were the lords of Lophai, and all other life existed by their sufferance. The people of the world had been their inferiors from unrecorded cycles; and even in the most primitive myths there was no suggestion that any other order of things had ever prevailed.

And the plants themselves, together with the fauna and mankind of Lophai, gave immemorial obeisance to that supreme and terrible flower known as the Voorqual, in which a tutelary demon, more ancient than the twin suns, was believed to have made its immortal avatar.

The Voorqual was served by a human priesthood, chosen from amid the royalty and aristocracy of Lophai. In the heart of the chief city, Lospar, in an equatorial realm, it had grown from antiquity on the summit of a high pyramid of sable terraces that loomed over the town like the hanging gardens of some greater Babylon, crowded with the lesser but deadly floral forms. At the center of the broad apex, the Voorqual stood alone in a basin level with the surrounding platform of black mineral. The basin was filled with a compost in which the dust of

royal mummies formed an essential ingredient.

The demon flower sprang from a bulb so incrustated with the growth of ages that it resembled a stone urn. Above this there rose the gnarled stalk that had displayed in earlier times the bifurcation of a mandrake, but whose halves had now grown together into a scaly, furrowed thing like the tail of some mythic sea monster. The stalk was variegated with hues of greening bronze, of antique copper, with the livid blues and purples of fleshly corruption. It ended in a crown of stiff, blackish leaves, banded and spotted with poisonous, metallic white, and edged with sharp serrations as of savage weapons. From below the crown issued a long, sinuous arm, scaled like the main stem, and serpentine downward and outward to terminate in the huge upright bowl of a bizarre blossom—as if the arm, in sardonic fashion, should hold out a hellish beggar's cup.

Abhorrent and monstrous was the bowl—which, like the leaves, was legended to renew itself at intervals of a thousand years. It smoldered with sullen ruby at the base; it lightened into zones of dragon's-blood, into belts of the rose of infernal sunset, on the full, swelling sides; and it flamed at the rim to a hot, yellowish nacarat red, like the ichor of salamanders. To one who dared peer within, the cup was lined with sepulchral violet, blackening toward the bottom, pitted with myriad pores, and streaked with turgescient veins of sulphurous green.

Swaying in a slow, lethal, hypnotic rhythm, with a deep and solemn sibilation, the Voorqual dominated the city of Lospar and the world Lophai. Below, on the tiers of the pyramid, the thronged ophidian plants kept time to this rhythm

in their tossing and hissing. And far beyond Lospar, to the poles of the planet and in all its longitudes, the living blossoms obeyed the sovereign tempo of the Voorqual.

Boundless was the power exercised by this being over the people who, for want of a better name, I have called the humankind of Lophai. Myriad and frightful were the legends that had gathered through æons about the Voorqual. And dire was the sacrifice demanded each year at the summer solstice by the demon: the filling of its proffered cup with the life blood of a priest or priestess, chosen from amid the assembled hierophants who passed before the Voorqual till the poised cup, inverted and empty, descended like a devil's miter on the head of one of their number.

LUNITHI, king of the realms about Lospar, and high priest of the Voorqual, was the last, if not the first, of his race to rebel against this singular tyranny. There were dim myths of some primordial ruler who had dared to refuse the required sacrifice, and whose people, in consequence, had been decimated by a mortal war with the serpentine plants which, obeying the demon, had uprooted themselves everywhere from the soil and had marched on the cities of Lophai, slaying or vampirizing all who fell in their way.

Lunithi, from childhood, had obeyed implicitly and without question the will of the floral overlord; had offered the stated worship, had performed the necessary rites. To withhold them would have been blasphemy. He had not dreamed of rebellion till, at the time of the annual choosing of the victim, and thirty suns before the date of his nuptials with Nala, priestess of the Voorqual, he saw the hesitant, in-

verted grail come down in deathly crimson on the fair head of his betrothed.

A sorrowful consternation, a dark, sullen dismay which he sought to smother in his heart, was experienced by Lunithi. Nala, dazed and resigned, in a mystic inertia of despair, accepted her doom without question; but a blasphemous doubt formed itself surreptitiously in the mind of the king.

Trembling with his own impiety, he asked himself if there was not some way in which he could save Nala, could cheat the demon of its ghastly tribute. To do this, and escape with impunity to himself and his subjects, he knew that he must strike at the very life of the monster, which was believed to be deathless and invulnerable. It seemed impious even to wonder concerning the truth of this belief, which had long assumed the force of a religious tenet and was held unanimously.

Amid such reflections, Lunithi remembered an old myth about the existence of a neutral and independent being known as the Occlith, a demon coeval with the Voorqual, and allied neither to man nor the flower creatures. This being was said to dwell beyond the desert of Aphom, in the otherwise unpeopled mountains of white stone above the habitat of the ophidian blossoms. In latter days no man had seen the Occlith, for the journey through Aphom was not lightly to be undertaken. But this entity was supposed to be immortal; and it kept apart and alone, meditating upon all things but interfering never with their processes. However, it was said to have given, in earlier times, valuable advice to a certain king who had gone forth from Lospar to its lair among the white crags.

In his grief and desperation, Lu-

nithi resolved to seek the Occlith and question it anent the possibility of slaying the Voorqual. If, by any mortal means, the demon could be destroyed, he would remove from Lophai the long-established tyranny whose shadow fell upon all things from the sable pyramid.

It was necessary for him to proceed with utmost caution, to confide in no one, to veil his very thoughts at all times from the occult scrutiny of the Voorqual. In the interim of five days between the choosing of the victim and the consummation of the sacrifice, he must carry out his mad plan.

Unattended, and disguised as a simple hunter of beasts, he left his palace during the short three-hour night of universal slumber, and stole forth toward the desert of Aphom. In the dawn of the balas-ruby sun, he had reached the pathless waste, and was toiling painfully over its knife-sharp ridges of dark stone, like the waves of a mountain ocean petrified in storm.

Soon the rays of the green sun were added to those of the other, and Aphom became a painted inferno through which Lunithi dragged his way, crawling from scarp to glassy scarp or resting at whiles in the colored shadows. There was no water anywhere; but swift mirages gleamed and faded, and the sifting sand appeared to run like rills in the bottom of deep valleys.

AT SETTING of the first sun, he came within sight of the pale mountains beyond Aphom, towering like cliffs of frozen foam above the desert's dark sea. They were tinged with transient lights of azure, of jade and orange in the going of the yellow-red orb and the westward slanting of its binary. Then the

lights melted into beryl and tourmaline, and the green sun was regnant over all, until it, too, went down, leaving a twilight whose colors were those of sea water. In the gloom, Lunithi reached the foot of the pale crags; and there, exhausted, he slept till the second dawn.

Rising, he began his escalade of the white mountains. They rose bleak and terrible before him against the hidden suns, with cliffs that were like the sheer terraces of gods. Like the king who had preceded him in the ancient myth, he found a precarious way that led upward through narrow, broken chasms. At last he came to the vaster fissure, riving the heart of the white range, by which it was possible to reach the legendary lair of the Occlith.

The chasm's beetling walls rose higher and higher above him, shutting out the suns but creating with their whiteness a wan and deathly glimmer to illumine his way. The fissure was such as might have been cloven by the sword of a macrocosmic giant. It led downward, steepening ever, like a wound that pierced to the heart of Lophai.

Lunithi, like all of his race, was able to exist for prolonged periods without other nutriment than sunlight and water. He had brought with him a metal flask, filled with the aqueous element of Lophai, from which he drank sparingly as he descended the chasm; for the white mountains were waterless, and he feared to touch the pools and streams of unknown fluids upon which he came at intervals in the dusk.

There were sanguine-colored springs that fumed and bubbled before him, to vanish in fathomless rifts; and brooklets of mercurial metal, green, blue, or amber, that wound beside him like liquescent

serpents and then slipped away into dark caverns. Acrid vapors rose from clefts in the chasm; and Lunithi felt himself among strange chemistries of nature. In this fantastic world of stone, which the plants of Lophai could never invade, he seemed to have gone beyond the Voorqual's grim, diabolic tyranny.

At last he came to a clear, watery pool, occupying almost the entire width of the chasm. In passing it he was forced to scramble along a narrow, insecure ledge at one side. A fragment of the marble stone, breaking away beneath his footfall, dropped into the pool as he gained the opposite edge; and the hueless liquid foamed and hissed like a thousand vipers. Wondering as to its properties, and fearful of the venomous hissing, which did not subside for some time, Lunithi hurried on, and came after an interval to the fissure's end.

Here he emerged in the huge craterlike pit that was the home of the Occlith. Fluted and columned walls went up to a stupendous height on all sides; and the sun of orange ruby, now at zenith, was pouring down a vertical cataract of gorgeous fires and shadows.

Addorsed against the farther wall of the pit in an upright posture, he beheld that being known as the Occlith, which had the likeness of a high cruciform pillar of blue mineral, shining with its own esoteric luster. Going forward, he prostrated himself before the pillar; and then, in accents that quavered with a deep awe, he ventured to ask the desired oracle.

FOR A WHILE the Occlith maintained its æon-old silence. Peering timidly, the king perceived the twin lights of mystic silver that

brightened and faded with a slow, rhythmic pulsation in the arms of the blue cross. Then, from the lofty, shining thing, there issued a voice that was like the tinkling of mineral fragments light'y clashed together, but which somehow shaped itself into articulate words.

"It is possible," said the Occlith, "to slay the plant known as the Voorqual, in which an elder demon has its habitation. Though the flower has attained millennial age, it is not necessarily immortal; for all things have their proper term of existence and decay, and nothing has been created without its corresponding agency of death. I do not advise you to slay the plant, but I can furnish you with the information which you desire. In the mountain chasms through which you came to seek me, there flows a hueless spring of mineral poison, deadly to all the ophidian plant life of this world."

The Occlith went on and told Lunithi the method by which the poison should be prepared and administered. The chill, toneless, tinkling voice concluded:

"I have answered your question. If there is anything more that you wish to learn, it would be well to ask me now."

Prostrating himself again, Lunithi gave thanks to the Occlith; and, considering that he had learned all that was requisite, he did not avail himself of the opportunity to question further the strange entity of living stone. And the Occlith, cryptic and aloof in its termless, impenetrable meditation, apparently saw fit to vouchsafe nothing more except in answer to a direct query.

Withdrawing from the marble-walled abyss, Lunithi returned in haste along the chasm till, reaching the pool of which the Occlith had spoken, he paused to empty his flask

and fill it with the angry, hissing liquid. Then he resumed his homeward journey.

At the end of two days, after incredible fatigues and torments in the blazing hell of Aphom, he reached Lospar in the time of darkness and slumber, as when he had departed. Since his absence had been unannounced, it was supposed that he had retired to the underground adyta below the pyramid of the Voorqual for purposes of prolonged meditation, as was sometimes his wont.

In alternate hope and trepidation, dreading the miscarriage of his plan and shrinking still from its audacious impiety, Lunithi awaited the night preceding that double dawn of summer solstice when, in a secret room of the black pyramid, the monstrous offering was to be made ready. Nala would be slain by a fellow priest or priestess, chosen by lot, and her blood would drip from the channeled altar into a great cup, and the cup would then be carried with solemn rites to the Voorqual and its contents poured into the evilly suppurative bowl of the sanguinated blossom.

He saw little of Nala during that interim. She was more withdrawn than ever, and seemed to have consecrated herself wholly to the coming doom. To no one—and least of all to his beloved—did Lunithi dare to hint a possible prevention of the sacrifice.

There came the dreaded eve, with a swiftly changing twilight of jeweled hues that turned to a darkness hung with auroral flame.

Lunithi stole across the sleeping city and entered the pyramid whose blackness towered massively amid the frail architecture of buildings that were little more than canopies and lattices of stone. With infinite care and caution he made the prep-

arations prescribed by the Occlith. Into the huge sacrificial cup of black metal, in a room lit with stored sunlight, he emptied the seething, sibilant poison he had brought with him from the white mountains. Then, openly adroitly a vein in one of his arms, he added a certain amount of his own blood to the lethal potion, above whose foaming crystal it floated like a magic oil, without mingling; so that the entire cup, to all appearance, was filled with the liquid most acceptable to the Satanic blossom.

Bearing in his hands the black grail, Lunithi ascended a hewn stairway that led to the Voorqual's presence. His heart quailing, his senses swooning in chill gulfs of terror, he emerged on the lofty summit above the shadowy town.

In a luminous azure gloom, against the weird and iridescent streamers of light that foreran the double dawn, he saw the dreamy swaying of the monstrous plant, and heard its somnolent hissing that was answered drowsily by myriad blossoms on the tiers below. A nightmare oppression, black and tangible, seemed to flow from the pyramid and to lie in stagnant shadow on all the lands of Lophai.

Aghast at his own temerity, and deeming that his shrouded thoughts would surely be understood as he drew nearer, or that the Voorqual would be suspicious of an offering brought before the accustomed hour, Lunithi made obeisance to his floral suzerain. The Voorqual vouchsafed no sign that it had deigned to perceive his presence; but the great flower cup, with its flaring crimsons dulled to garnet and purple in the twilight, was held forward as if in readiness to receive the hideous gift.

Breathless, and fainting with re-

ligious fear, in a moment of suspense that seemed eternal, Lunithi poured the blood-mantled poison into the cup. The venom boiled and hissed like a wizard's brew as the thirsty flower drank it up; and Lunithi saw the scaled arm draw back, tilting its demon grail quickly as if to repudiate the doubtful potion.

IT WAS too late; for the poison had been absorbed by the blossom's porous lining. The tilting motion changed in midair to an agonized writhing of the reptilian arm; and then the Voorqual's huge, scaly stalk and pointed leaf-crown began to toss in a deathly dance, waving darkly against the auroral curtains of morn. Its deep hissing sharpened to an insupportable note, fraught with the pain of a dying devil; and, looking down from the platform edge on which he crouched to avoid the swaying growth, Lunithi saw that the lesser plants on the terraces were now tossing in a mad unison with their master. Like noises in an ill dream, he heard the chorus of their tortured sibilations.

He dared not look again at the Voorqual, till he became aware of a strange silence, and saw that the blossoms below had ceased to writhe and were drooping limply on their stems. Then, incredulous, he knew that the Voorqual was dead.

Turning in triumph mingled with horror, he beheld the flaccid stalk that had fallen prone on its bed of unholy compost. He saw the sudden withering of the stiff, sworded leaves, of the gross and hellish cup. Even the stony bulb appeared to collapse and crumble before his eyes. The entire stem, its evil colors fading swiftly, shrank and fell in upon itself like a sere, empty serpent skin.

At the same time, in some ob-

scure manner, Lunithi was still aware of a presence that brooded above the pyramid. Even in the death of the Voorqual, it seemed to him that he was not alone.

Then, as he stood and waited, fearing he knew not what, he felt the passing of a cold and unseen thing in the gloom—a thing that flowed across his body like the thick coils of some enormous python, without sound, in dark, clammy undulations. A moment more and it was gone, and Lunithi no longer felt the brooding presence.

He turned to go; but it seemed that the dying night was full of an unconceived terror that gathered before him as he went down the long, somber stairs. Slowly he descended, and a weird despair was upon him. He had slain the Voorqual, had seen it wither in death. Yet he could not believe the thing he had done; the lifting of the ancient doom was still no more than an idle myth.

The twilight brightened as he passed through the slumbering city. According to custom, no one would be abroad for another hour. Then the priests of the Voorqual would gather for the annual blood offering.

Midway between the pyramid and his own palace, Lunithi was more than startled to meet the maiden Nala. Pale and ghostly, she glided by him with a swift and swaying movement almost serpentine, which differed oddly from her habitual languor. Lunithi dared not accost her when he saw her shut, unheeding eyes, like those of a somnambulist; and he was awed and troubled by the strange ease, the unnatural surety of her motion, which reminded him of something which he feared to remember. In a turmoil of fantastic doubt, he followed.

Threading the exotic maze of Lospar with the fleet and sinuous

glide of a homing serpent, Nala entered the sacred pyramid. Lunithi, less swift than she, had fallen behind; and he knew not where she had gone in the myriad vaults and chambers; but a dark and fearsome intuition drew his steps without delay to the platform of the summit.

He knew not what he should find; but his heart was drugged with an esoteric hopelessness, and he was aware of no surprise when he came forth in the dawn and beheld the thing which awaited him.

The maiden Nala—or that which he knew to be Nala—was standing in the basin of evil compost, above the withered remains of the Voorqual. She had undergone—was still undergoing—a monstrous and diabolic metamorphosis.

Her frail, slight body had assumed a long and dragonlike shape, and the tender skin was marked off in incipient scales that darkened with a mottling of baleful hues. Her head was no longer recognizable as

such, and the human lineaments were flaring into a weird semicircle of pointed leaf buds. Her lower limbs had joined together, had rooted themselves in the ground. One of her arms was becoming a part of the reptilian bole, and the other was lengthening into a scaly stem that bore the dark-red bud of a sinister blossom.

More and more the monstrosity took on the similitude of the Voorqual; and Lunithi, crushed by the ancient awe and dark, terrible faith of his ancestors, could feel no longer any doubt of its true identity. Soon there was no trace of Nala in the thing before him, which began to sway with a sinuous, pythonlike rhythm, and to utter a deep and measured sibilation, to which the plants on the lower tiers responded.

He knew then that the Voorqual had returned to claim its sacrifice and preside forever above the city Lospar and the world Lophai.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of March 3, 1933, of Astounding Stories, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1933.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared George C. Smith, Jr., who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of the Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of *Astounding Stories*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, F. Orin Tremaine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., a corporation owned through stock holdings by the Estate of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; the Estate

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GEORGE C. SMITH, Jr., President,
Of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1933. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 32, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1934.)

Let's Get Down to **BRASS TACKS**



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BRASS TACKS" are handy. They drive right to the heart of any problem or controversy. **ASTOUNDING STORIES** is back again with a new policy. It is a carefully planned and slowly unfolding policy which will please you more and more as time passes, because, first and foremost, you—our readers—are a thinking group.

Our purpose is to bring to you each month one story carrying a new and unexplored "thought-variant" in the field of scientific fiction. This month you will find it in *Ancestral Voices* by Nat Schachner. It carries a thought which has been slurred over or passed by in many, many stories.

But it opens the way for real discussion, discussion deeply connected with social science, the present condition of the world, and the future. It bows to no prejudices; it speaks its mind frankly—as will all our stories, without regard for the restrictions formerly placed on this type of fiction. There are two possible thoughts as to inconsistency which the author has answered satisfactorily, as we see it, but we want your reactions. The very discussion may open new lines of thought to be explored.

ASTOUNDING STORIES is, perforce, a medium of logical fantasy. It must not become "habit-ridden"—or "grooved"—into a single line of thought. We shall continue to explore the interplanetary airways, the æons past and future; the interexisting worlds of the present; the shadowy realms which are suggested by vibratory force. You will find no "hack" stories in our pages, nor the dull, windy, lifeless variety. But always you will find real, convincing people; and profound, serious thought animating the structure of the stories. And you will find the best-known authors; and you will find their best work.

Next month, Donald Wandrei brings us our feature thought-story. Again there will be room for debate in our Brass Tacks forum. And since debate and thought go hand in hand, we know you'll like it.—The Editors.

Farewell to Earth

In connection with my story, *Farewell to Earth*, it should be remembered that the story is based upon a series of premises or preceding action—see *A Race Through Time*, October ASTOUNDING STORIES. These premises are that Web Conning has traveled through space and time, and returns to Earth at the end of a million years. His rival, Warren Daniels, had abducted Ellen Mac-Orm, the girl he loved. By retarded animation, the two lived at an infinitely slowed tempo in a crystal dome, and came out of their state of suspended animation in the year 1,000,000. Web, through a miscalculation, returned to Earth a million years from the time he left, thus coming back in the year 1,001,950, or nearly two thousand years after Warren and Ellen.

There are several points of scientific interest in *Farewell to Earth* upon which whole books could be written—not that I intend to write them! For example, the girl is given marked differences from the average woman of our day. The question is, would such changes occur in the descendants of Ellen and Warren in two thousand years? The answer is undoubtedly "yes." Human beings have a remarkable capacity for adjustment to new conditions. Every one is familiar with the fact that athletes have a much larger chest and lung expansion than ordinary people, and that enlargement of the heart is common in trackmen. Wide differences in stomach capacity exist among different persons, depending on various factors such as environment, type of food, profession, parentage, and so on. Thus it is not only possible, but probable, that Ellayn, because of the peculiar and changed nature of the world against which Ellen, Warren, and their descendants pitted themselves in the struggle for survival, would develop the characteristics mentioned: larger chest, to absorb enough oxygen from rarefied air; small waist, because of limited food; an almost complete lack of pigmentation, or an almost complete whiteness, since the Sun's rays had become so feeble that protective coloring was unnecessary. I have by no means touched upon all the modifications that would probably occur. It might be interesting to hear what additional variations your readers think would result from the set of circumstances given.

With regard to the comet that had such deadly effect, it is perhaps unnecessary to go into much detail. Most people know of the great meteors that landed in Arizona long ago and in Russia about twenty years ago. The Russian meteor wiped out a herd of reindeer, sent a forest up in flames, and flattened the trees in a wide surrounding area. With this evidence of what a comparatively small mass can do, it is easy to visualize what would happen if a mass as large as the Sun swept close to Earth—and there is no telling when that might happen; perhaps never, or perhaps to-day. If we can use the Russian meteorite as an illustration, a large body would suck the atmosphere from Earth, raise enormous tides, cause earthquakes beyond any that history records, and could easily attract the Moon to follow it. Furthermore, it might disrupt the Sun, drawing away part of the mass, and bringing the remainder close to Earth.

The idea of a winged, single-sexed race produced by biological control is not beyond the bounds of possibility. There have been already cases in medical history of individuals who possessed to greater or less degree the characteristics of both sexes. The ancient Greeks in the hermaphrodite deity had such a concept. The probable life of such beings, able to fly and single-sexed, opens up new realms of speculation; for most of the rivalry, jealousy, and antagonism between man and woman would be minimized, and such a race would have a sympathy and a unity of mutual understanding which simply do not exist in our time. It is fascination, though fruitless, to wonder what a lightness of spirit, a breathless joy in existence, they would experience from the power to soar like birds.

A couple of other points in *Farewell to Earth* may be worth mention. The statements concerning new elements above 92, and new colors, have considerable validity. The fact that only ninety-two elements are known does not mean that only ninety-two can exist. With the progress of chemistry, it is possible that chemists can control atomic structure to the point of creating elements, and the manufacture of new elements lies but a step farther. It is general knowledge that there are rays at both ends of the spectrum which we cannot see, but which would register as new colors if we could.

One other point: the rational vegetation mentioned in the story is no great distance removed from our age. From time to time, newspapers report discovery of tree roots that have turned aside and traveled long distances unerringly toward water, often bursting water mains. Is this accident, or is it rudimentary intelligence?—Donald Wandrei.

Ancestral Voices

Time-traveling stories in the past have always given rise to slightly frenetic discussion among the readers. And with reason. In the first place, most of the methods used for traversing time as against space have left much to be desired scientifically.

Donald Wandrei, in his excellent story, *A Race Through Time*, among others, has ventured a plausible explanation involving the well-known principle that speeds approaching that of light cause time to lag sufficiently so that an instant of the traveler's time represents ages of normal Earth time.

The idea may be elaborated further to localize the traveling in space by utilizing tremendously rapid vibrations. Direction of the speed does not alter the principle involved. To travel into the past offers considerably greater difficulties. The square root of minus one, an irrational negative quantity, which appears in almost all of the important formulas of space-time, suggests, however, reversal processes in time as well as in space.

Many a heated science-fiction fan has triumphantly demolished time traveling into the past with the *reductio ad absurdum*: what would happen if the hero kills his own ancestor?

Ancestral Voices attempts the logical unfolding of this idea. The traveler does kill his ancestor, with astounding results. The idea is decidedly intriguing. If the common ancestor dies before he sired children, then they never existed, and must disappear at the precise moment of his demise. If he dies after the birth of his offspring, the course of the future generations would not be affected.

The story has another purpose. It is a satire on the almost universal myth of racial purity; on the attempt of certain important sections of our world population to arrogate to themselves domi-

nance because, forsooth, they are of a strain that has come unfiltered through the ages, superior in character, in arms, in ability, in everything, to all other races.

This position is unscientific and indefensible in the extreme. There is no man living to-day whose ancestors would not represent many strains. Modern research has conclusively established this fact.

Instead of bemoaning the situation, the world should consider it a matter for congratulation. The great religions were wiser than these arrogant moderns; they sensed the indubitable fact that all men are truly, and racially, brothers. Rightly applied, this thesis would make for the immediate evolving of a supercivilization.—Nat Schachner.

We're Glad You're Glad

Dear Editor:

I was delighted to see the return of *ASTOUNDING STORIES* to the stands in September. While the issue as a whole is not up to the standard of the old *A. S.*, there were some good improvements and some better stories.

For one thing, I was glad to see that you will incorporate stories dealing with the supernatural in the magazine. I'm sure that the blending of the supernatural with science will prove a very popular form with the readers.

Now for the stories themselves. *The Space Coffin* by Gilmore and *A Race Through Time* by Wandrei are two remarkable stories. The first because of its originality of plot and its smooth style, the second for the same reasons—and because of that *surprise* ending! The rest of the stories were fair, and some of those pretty poor. Stories like *Anything Can Happen!* don't belong in *A. S.*

It's been the custom of science-fiction magazines to have the best illustrators, but it seems to me that *A. S.* has the worst. Of the lot, only Sewell is half-way good. I, for one, move that Wesso be brought back. Here was a man that could draw! His illustrations were a part of the old *ASTOUNDING*, and the magazine doesn't look the same without his drawings. Do we get him back?

Among the authors I'd like to see in *ASTOUNDING* are Murray Leinster, Arthur J. Burks, Ray Cummings, R. F.

Starzl, Captain S. P. Meeks, and the rest of the old-timers. Wish you would continue the *Hawk Carse* and *Captain John Hanson* series—but not the *Doctor Bird* series.—Julius Schwartz, 255 East 188th Street, New York City.

Mangled Meshes

Dear Editor:

I received the news of the revival of **ASTOUNDING STORIES** with the greatest pleasure. You can make sure that I was one of the first to buy it when it came in.

Of course, I picked up the Street & Smith variety of A. S. with considerable interest, because I was anxious to compare it with that of old. To be frank with you, looking through the eyes of a science-fiction fan, the new A. S. does not come up to the standard set by the old. The real science-fiction fan does not care for stories of the supernatural. His real interest is in a story that blends science in with a well-laid plot. Some of the stories in the October issue were perfect examples of this. I do not know whether **ASTOUNDING STORIES** under the new owners is supposed to be purely scientific or not, but I do hope that they are not so deeply mangled in the meshes of sensational fiction that they do not see the need of a good science-fiction magazine unadulterated by any other types of stories. Science fiction and strange fiction do not go together any more than detective stories and Western stories. Here is a suggestion: Why not separate these two types of fiction into two different magazines, leaving **ASTOUNDING STORIES** purely for science fiction? Remember, intelligent people, as a rule, will read science fiction, but try and get them to read this so-called weird fiction which some people try to compare with it.

The best stories in the issue were *A Race Through Time*, *The Coffin Ship*, and *Fire Imps of Vesuvius*. You will notice that these were the only real scientific fiction stories in the magazine. *The Orange God* was faintly scientific fiction, but more adventure. *Burroughs Passes*, *Anything Can Happen!* *From the Wells of the Brain*, *Don Mackinder's Model*, *Ping Ting*, *Where Four Roads Met*, and *Callahuaya's Curse* were nothing but stories written to make the blood run faster.

Stories of this type are positively foolish!

The magazine itself is not bad. Give us more stories like the three novelettes, and I imagine everybody will be satisfied. Be sure and have a readers' department, because this is more interesting than the stories themselves. I would also like to see an editorial and science questions and answers.—Edward F. Gervais, 512 South Pennsylvania Avenue, Lansing, Michigan.

Brickbats

Dear Editor:

Congrats on the reappearance of **ASTOUNDING STORIES**. I have just read your first issue.

Now, a science-fiction editor must get used to brickbats, so here goes. Well, maybe it's the excitement of seeing the old fellow again, but I can't find much to kick over. By the way, cram the tales with adventure, make them as fantastic as possible, but don't forget you're in the science-fiction field now. I thought Donald Wandrei's *A Race Through Time* the best in the first issue. There were the inevitable time-travel contradictions present, of course. The plot was excellent. Nat Schachner and Tony Gilmore wove interesting tales.

The cover was neat. Who's the artist? I would like to see Wesso alternate every other month. *The Orange God* was not the story illustrated; however, in **ASTOUNDING**, they say, *Anything Can Happen!* (Some authorities claim a pun is the lowest form of joke. I wonder—)

Re the tale by Colonel P. H. Fawcett, your readers might be interested in a novel based on Fawcett's own notes and dealing with age-old Mu—*Mukara*, by Muriel Bruce.

Here's some suggestions for your delectation:

1. Keep away from pure adventure thrillers and run-of-the-mill stories; never have a happy ending just for the sake of a happy ending; don't shun or reject tales that seem too fantastic or unusual on account of dear old editorial tradition.

2. Let's have more social-science narratives of the future. Give everybody a break. Yes, the Socialists, Technocrats, and—speak softly—the Communists. Boiled down and analyzed, they are the really democratic ideas, anyway—if you

don't "think" emotionally. Am I right? But please don't give them a capitalistic slant—at least, not *all* of them.

3. If an NRA code is ever drawn up for publishers of fantastic fiction, one of the most vital clauses should—*may, must*—be: "All edges to be trimmed *evenly*."

Say, I do hope you can see fit to reissue ASTOUNDING'S companion of weird fiction—STRANGE TALES. If you do, please keep up the standard, more or less, set by its former editor.—Lester Anderson, 271 Peralta Street, Hayward, California.

Time Traveling Is Impossible!

Dear Editor:

It was with great pleasure that I noted the reappearance of ASTOUNDING STORIES on the news stands. The last two issue of the old magazine were the only ones that I had the opportunity to purchase. May I hope that there will be no radical change in editorial policy? The return of the readers' corner would also be very welcome.

In the new issue I noticed only four names of authors familiar to the science-fiction fraternity. This is, I trust, an indication that new additions to the ranks of the old authors will be welcomed without any corresponding falling away of the old hands.

Time-traveling discussion is my forte. I hope that Donald Wandrei's story will start it up anew with many new and unique arguments to befuddle an otherwise clear (?) mind. P. S. Miller once wrote that time traveling is not incompatible with any laws of physics or chemistry, but "he don't know from nothin'." Time traveling is impossible because it is contrary to the laws of conservation of mass and energy! First, you're in the present universe; then you're out of it because you're in a new time. Now you've removed the matter and energy which is yourself and your machine from the present universe. But experimental fact in the shape of those two laws says: "No can do." So—it is impossible to time travel. Oh, Pulease, Mr. Scienceer, don't sne me for sacrilege!

"And with that he closed his letter with the usual request for correspondents interested in similar subjects."—William S. Sykora, 31-51 Forty-first Street, Long Island City, New York.

How About It Now?

Dear Editor:

So the magazine's back? You're looking some different for the six months' absence, but I imagine you'll be hearing from the same old bunch of fans. They'll find you.

Since the magazine's name is still ASTOUNDING STORIES, there's one thing wrong with it: some of the stories *aren't*. You run a peculiar mixture of tales and have an artist, or artists, I haven't run across before. It seems you might have chosen a more amazing cover; but of course it was solely the name—ASTOUNDING STORIES—that attracted me.

Your table of contents is nicely arranged. And, for the stories—well, you don't claim to be a science-fiction publication, do you? You don't describe anywhere that your tales are "stories of superscience," or anything like that, so I guess we can't talk. But you'll doubtless find that the majority of readers are going to be yelling for more science-fiction yarns. We're funny that way.

The Orange God was weird-fiction, the being from another planet but half-satisfying the demand for a scientific theme. *Burroughs Passes*, obvious as to ending, was more or less a ghost story. *Anything Can Happen*—a rather interesting tale, but hardly weird or scientific. *From the Wells of the Brain*—regular readers know Paul Ernst. Again the outcome could be suspected, but it was a good story; and title very fine. The next four shorts were a waste of time. If it's nightmares you want, I have better ones by simply going to sleep.

Reaching the novelettes, the real science-tinted stories. I *do* think *A Race Through Time* was one of the most implausible and leaky stories ever put together. For instance, I'm sure I wouldn't be satisfied with the explanation "let the dead rest in peace" if there were a domed opaque quartz structure around my place containing a normally dressed man and woman, the man in the act of sitting down, with some strange machinery in the room to boot. I'm certain it would be the subject of much curiosity, investigation, newspaper stories, et cetera. But with it all, it was a thoroughly interesting story. The end was sad and ironical, but clever. *Fire Imps of Vesuvius*, science fiction all right; but I've read others somehow similar. *The Coffin*

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GIVEN

**Send
Money
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Ship is the gripping tale that's the prize of your first issue. Anthony Gilmore's a slick writer. Have in issues past enjoyed his *Hawk Carse* series, and must hand it to him for the quick creation of some more real characters. Palardo and his Princess Tuaris! How interesting was the story of the events leading up to their death! Sorry I haven't saved more room to comment on this "certainly satisfied" at greater length. But for benefit of author and editor, congratulations to the first of you!—and good judgment—choose more like it—to the second!

So, briefly: welcome back! Your illustrations are adequate, but they aren't special; and illustrations for an **ASTOUNDING STORIES** magazine should be special.

Now, watch; I leave it up to you. Anything **CAN** happen!—Forrest J. Ackerman, 530 Staples Avenue, San Francisco, California.

Serials—Time Traveling—Love!

Dear Editor:

As by this time, many people have picked up the copy of the new **ASTOUNDING STORIES** they will already be sending in suggestions on how to run the magazine, so I see no harm in my telling you a few things also.

First: By all means have a letter forum, three pages or more in thickness.

Second: By all means have serials—two and three parts. To suggest authors,

I will name Ray Cummings for one—if he doesn't write such trash as *The Exile of Time*, *Wandl the Invader*, *The White Invaders*, *The Insect Invasion*. If he hands you something as great as *Tarrano the Conqueror*, grab it, and grab it quick! Ray Cummings would be a better author than he is if he would look his stories over and find a way to overcome the horribly boring parts of his stories—and incidentally work out some brand-new plots. E. E. Smith I will name for another serial writer. You might get C. W. Diffin, too. He was rather good. But for goodness sake, be discriminating in your choice of serials. Every one dislikes half-baked serials, which set men and women in a strange clime and lead them into constant fights with wild animals. That stuff's dull. When we get a serial concerning time traveling, we want situations wherein the whole story revolves about time. May I cite the example of Donald Wandrei in *A Race Through Time*. That story has the elements I like in a time story. Incidentally, that story is your best, and it demands a sequel. Nuff said on the serial problem.

Third: If you insist on bringing a mushy love story into your mag! A good, wholesome, sincere love element woven in is good. But persuade your writers, if their stories are short, merely to start man and girl off on their romance—let us imagine that they marry later, after many months. On this matter, Mr. Editor, please curb Earl Vincent, if you get him!—Paul Cahendon, 322 West 4th Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

R. F. STARZL

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